



Tim Atkin *The wine-list inspector* Escape the beef in Buenos Aires with fine fish, and a cellar to match

many millions of brain cells. The art of neuroimaging has been in full swing for not much more than a decade. In a study of its reliability, two psychologists at the University of California at Santa Barbara concluded in 2010 that the discipline had emerged from infancy, but was still rather a mixed-up adolescent.

That may be an understatement as far as experiments on thinking, emotion and personality are concerned. A team of psychologists at MIT and the University of California at San Diego, puzzled by the suspiciously definitive results of many brain-scan studies, asked the authors of 55 such papers how they had analysed their data. The team reported in 2009 that over half the studies used faulty methods, guaranteed to shift the results in favour of the correlations they had been looking for between mental activity and blips in parts of the brain. It's worth bearing this in mind the next time you read about a study which purportedly reveals how and why we do what we do.

No doubt brain scanners, and our ability to interpret them, will improve in due course. But the problem with trying to investigate some aspects of our mental life via the workings of the brain is not just a practical one. This fact is nicely illustrated by Tallis's discussion of a series of experiments that have been widely taken to undermine the notion of free will. In the 1980s, the late Benjamin Libet, a neurophysiologist at the University of California, San Francisco, wired up his subjects to monitor the timing of some electrical events in their brains. He asked them to flex their wrists whenever they felt like it, and to register the exact time they decided to do so. The results seemed to show that our actions can be triggered before we form an intention, thus leaving no time for conscious will to play a role in what we do. Similar tests have been held and refined, and appear to confirm that the feeling of deliberation can be a mirage. But while twitches of the wrist may be simple to monitor, they're an odd place to search for free will.

It sounds like the drunk and his streetlights again. Tallis points out that taking part in such experiments involves performing all sorts of other actions, too, such as setting an alarm to get there on time, declining other appointments, catching a bus, finding the right room and listening to instructions. Mundane as they are, such activities are better examples of the actions that we'd like to regard as free and rational than are twitches of the wrist. And it would be crazy to think that conscious deliberation isn't involved in them.

Stepping back from investigations of the brain to look at our actions in the context of everyday life isn't quite the clincher that Dr Johnson would have liked. But it is a good beginning on't. ■

Anthony Gottlieb is the author of *"The Dream of Reason"*

If you're suffering from a surfeit of steak – and in Argentina, that goes with the territory – the place to head for is Oviedo. This relaxed, Mediterranean-style restaurant in Barrio Norte serves some of the best fish in Buenos Aires, cooked with understated flair by Martín Rebaudino. For lunch or dinner, Oviedo is hard to beat.

It's worth a visit for the wine list, too, assembled over the years by the owner, Emilio Garip. You can browse electronically, but I'd advise you to read and enjoy it in paper form. There are two selections: one of "everyday" wines from 85 to 200 Argentine pesos (\$20-46), and another of rarer and more expensive bottles, up to 6,800 pesos (\$1,570). By common consent, this is a fantastic collection, blending the best of France, Spain and Italy with a line-up of most leading local wines.

The physical list is rather traditional, mostly arranged by winery rather than style. This could be unhelpful if you don't know your Chacra from your Colomé, but the waiting staff are knowledgeable and happy to help you choose.

What Oviedo boasts is strength in depth: serial vintages of some of Argentina's best wines. If you want to drink an older bottle of Catena Zapata, Achaval Ferrer Finca Mirador or Noemía, this is the place to come. In a few instances, not all vintages are listed, but a sommelier will check the cellar if necessary.

You can eat meat at Oviedo – many of the reds are unsuited to seafood – but I'd suggest you eat fish and choose a wine to match. There aren't as many white wines on the list as there should be, but there are 50 or so, listed (unlike the reds) by grape variety.

Though whites in Argentina aren't as diverse as in Chile, there are still good options, including Chardonnays, Sauvignon Blancs and the local speciality, Torrontés. I chose

a delicious rarity: the herbal, textured, lightly oaked, refreshing 2010 Mendel Semillon from Mendoza, a bargain at 110 peso (\$25) for a bottle. It worked brilliantly with both ceviche and hake.

Emilio Garip loves sweet and fortified wines, so don't miss out on dessert, or at least a bottle of something sticky – like the Terrazas Afincado Tardío Petit Manseng. The only frustration is that these, like the rest of the list, are not available by the glass. But no matter. Oviedo is the sort of place where only 75cl will do. Around 260 pesos pp (\$60) for three courses at lunch; oviedorest.com.ar

THE COMPETITION

It has only been open a few months, but **Aldo's**, a wine shop and restaurant run by the youthful Aldo Graziani in fashionable San Telmo, is already a wine lovers' hang-out. The list, presented on an iPad, is almost exclusively Argentine, with more than 500 wines, many of them from exciting young producers. The largely meat-free menu is good, rather than spectacular, but it's the wines that matter. And the takeaway and restaurant prices are identical: around 40 pesos (\$9) for a main course.

At **Nectarine**, Rodrigo Sieiro cooks innovative French food at around 120 pesos (\$28) for a main course. The wine list is the work of Paz Levinson, Argentina's champion sommelier. It's an international selection, carefully made and helpfully divided by grape and style. It's educational, too, with blurbs on different grapes and even a few maps. The foreign wines are appealing, the Argentine selection even better.

aldosvinoteca.com; nectarine.com.ar. Tim Atkin is a Master of Wine and winner of many writing awards. His columns are at moreintelligentlife.com/section/wine-list-inspector



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