

# Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

FINCA BUEN VINO  
NEAR ARACENA, SPAIN

Set in the midst of an Andalusian nature reserve near the town of Aracena is **Finca Buen Vino**, a unique outpost of English culture and society. Proprietors Sam and Jeannie Chesterton built the place from the foundation up in the early 1980s. Looking back on those times now, Sam jokingly describes their approach as “the foolishness of total innocence.” Opened to guests in 1986, the house has the feeling of being much older—perhaps the result of such fortuitous additions as a group of matched, 200-year old high doors acquired when an old Madrid neighborhood was taken down. In the intervening years, the Chestertons have also spawned a family on the property, which is now made lively with their 3 teenagers.

Sam and Jeannie raise free-range pigs and make their very own *serrano* ham, a regional specialty. After slaughter, they salt the meat and cure it for a full 2 years in the family cellars. They also harvest about 6 tons of sweet chestnuts every year and, once a decade, strip valuable bark of cork-producing trees.

The bed and breakfast offers 5 rooms—ours lacked an en-suite bath, which makes it an exception among guest houses we visited—plus 3 cottages for self-catering guests, each with its own swimming pool.

Here, as at many Spanish houses, the *finca* has both a winter salon and a summer salon. In summer, life is largely lived out on the cool blue veranda, or beside a nicely designed pool that is reached along a trel-



Finca Buen Vino is set in a nature reserve

lised walk and is perched over a precipice to yield fine views of the hills beyond. In winter, the fireplace in the bright yellow living room blazes with warmth.

Sam and Jeannie have drawn upon previous experience in the hospitality industry—ranging from Scottish hunting inns to wine bars in Hong Kong—in developing the distinctive style of their *finca*. Jeannie offers 5- and 6- day courses in Andalusian cooking, and for sources she draws upon local ingredients like sherry, pork, and the wild mushrooms that are found in the countryside. She eschews cream and butter in favor of rather healthier olive oil and garlic—in fact, she explains, “they’re my two main ingredients.” Judging by the meal she served on the evening we visited—pasta with scallops and sun-dried tomatoes, tender Iberian black pig with wild mushrooms, beet-root rice, and a cream-cheese desert with raspberry

*coulis*—Jeannie is a force to be reckoned with in the kitchen.

After dinner, the mainly English clientele returned to a comfortable sitting room and formed up by the fireplace to play board games. Tired from the day hikes they'd taken along some of the many ancient footpaths which lace the region, their pleasure over the good food and the convivial atmosphere was obvious.

Jeannie says of their *finca*, "It's like a home rather than a hotel. We try to make our guests feel at home, and that means finding out what they're interested in doing—there's so much here!"



Sam and Jeannie Chesterton

This article was written by contributing editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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**Finca Buen Vino**

Sam and Jeannie Chesterton  
Los Marines  
21293 Huelva (Aracena)  
Spain  
Phone: 959 12 40 34  
Email: [buenvino@facilnet.es](mailto:buenvino@facilnet.es)