

“We’re trying to give people an opportunity to discover and taste more wine.”

Despite being open just a couple of months, The Wine Rooms is enjoying brisk business on The Pantiles. **Eileen Leahy** meets its owner Daniel Hatton to uncork the secret of its success

Ever since chef Daniel Hatton and his wife Lisa opened their deli and lifestyle emporium Hattons three years ago on The Pantiles they have enjoyed enormous success.

It’s the place to go to for pastries and superior cups of coffee – Monmouth since you ask – in the morning, delicious homemade sandwiches and salads at lunchtime or a slice of gooey cake and a cuppa in the afternoon. While you’re there you can browse the store’s beautifully curated array of interiors finds and decadent deli delights that’ll supercharge your store cupboard quicker than you can say virgin olive oil. The only thing Hattons really lacked was a decent seating area to accommodate its ever growing client base so when the building next door came up for sale earlier this year Daniel says it was a ‘no brainer’ to buy it and expand the business.

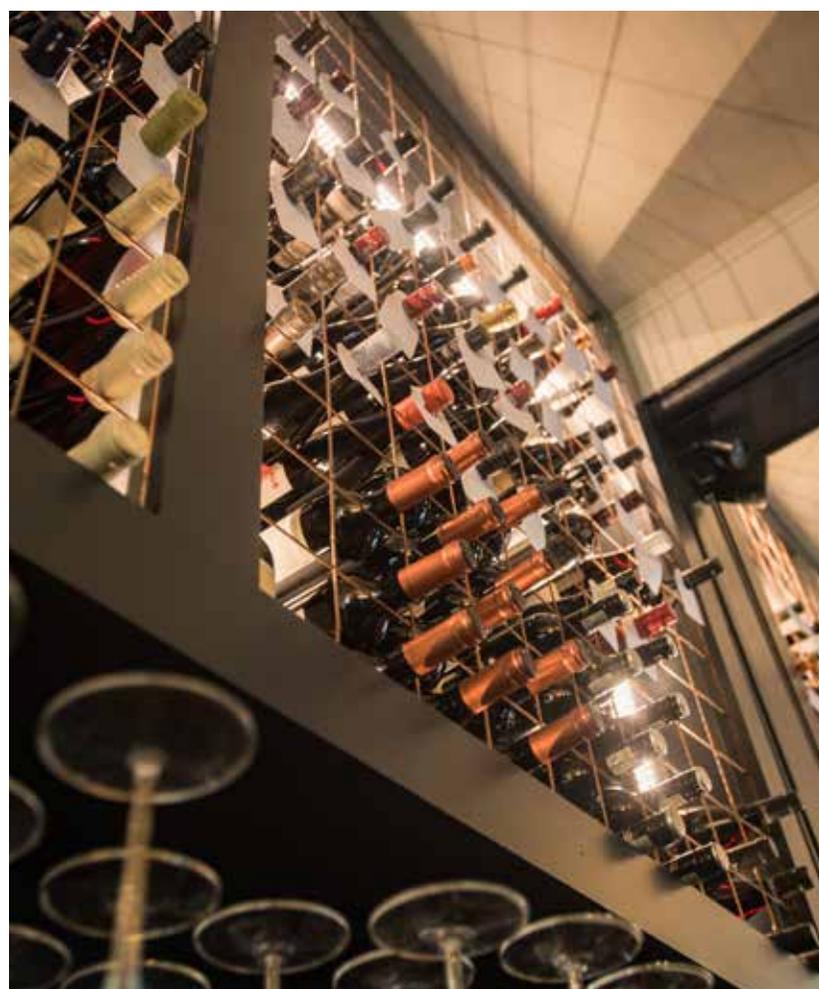
“Hattons is thriving and packed all day and we’re doing incredibly well with our private catering company too, so we were actually in the process of looking to set up

another venture somewhere,” says Daniel, who has worked for Thackeray’s, Marco Pierre White and Gordon Ramsey over the years.

“When the place next door came up, we thought to ourselves we wouldn’t get a better opportunity than this. It really was a no brainer. We wanted to spread awareness of our brand and we were continually being told by our Hattons customers that there was nowhere to go and drink nice wine in Tunbridge Wells.

“Yes, of course there are plenty of bars which sell wine but we did our research and found there wasn’t anywhere that was specifically a wine bar and certainly nowhere catering for an older, affluent clientele.”

And so the idea for The Wine Rooms was born and creating it has meant Lisa and Daniel have doubled the alfresco seating area to 60 and also given the discerning diners of Tunbridge Wells an additional epicurean experience thanks to the fact that they will be using their Hattons kitchen to prepare food – both sharing platters and a fine dining menu – at The Wine Rooms in addition to



serving glasses of vino. It's the first time Daniel has gone back into the kitchen after a number of years but he says he's 'relishing' it. "I think fine wine deserves good food to go with it and I'm enjoying matching the two," he smiles.

Just like with Hattons, Daniel has again enlisted the expert eye of his wife Lisa to ensure that The Wine Rooms' interiors reflect the quality of the food and drink on offer. Lisa, who used to manage French and Scandi interiors shop Maison in Tunbridge Wells, and her friend Caroline Pickering from Style My Home have transformed the two-floor building into a beautifully appointed establishment, decorating it in a slew of sultry, inky tones offset with lots of luxury rich velvet seating, twinkling votives, oversized plants and statement Italian glass lighting – not to mention a stunning mirrored main bar area.

"We saw a gap in the market for something high-end, exclusive and charming – something we don't have in Tunbridge Wells so that's why we did it," continues Daniel. "It's not a boozier, it's where you go for a lovely glass of wine, or a cocktail, some food and a great experience – and to have that on The Pantiles is just perfect as we love it here."

At The Wine Rooms you can taste over 350 different varieties of wine – 18 of which are by the glass – and if you like what you're drinking then you can also buy bottles by the case too.

"We have access to over 6,000 wines," adds Daniel. "But if wine isn't your tippie then we also have a 24-item gin menu, a very decent cocktail list which we have taken plenty of time curating, as well as lots of beer options too. For us it's all about being accessible to everyone in the town."

So whether you're nipping in for a cheeky post-work glass of Sauvignon Blanc or celebrating a special occasion over a bottle of Sancerre and a two-course dinner, the key aim is for customers to really enjoy The Wine Rooms experience.

"Lisa and I love the European way of

drinking and eating, but we also love the American style of sitting at the bar and talking to the barman over a glass of something. Coming here is about taking your time to appreciate quality food and drink in beautiful surroundings."

He goes on to say that they hope to do lots of specialist events with Jo Maclean AKA The Wine Savvy and have just launched a new Wine Rooms membership. And for the record, a quick glance at the menu will tell you that for a normal glass of wine they're no more expensive than anywhere else on The Pantiles. What they're trying to do is give people an opportunity to discover more and enrich their palette.

"If you want to drink some vintage Burgundy or a crazy Californian Napa then guess what? You can do that here! All the wines we sell are from small, independent, family-owned wineries. There are no supermarket wines here. Anything we notice we can buy elsewhere then we pull it off the menu as it's just not our bag. We also want to support a lot of local English winemakers so we have offerings from the likes of nearby Herbert Hall in Marden, Hidden Spring in Heathfield and Ditchling's Court Garden."

And Daniel is quick to point out that you don't have to know all about wine in order to drink at The Wine Rooms.

"You don't have to be a sommelier to come here. Every winemaker I meet, I ask them why they make wine and they always respond it's because they want people to put it in a glass and enjoy drinking it! There's no snobs at The Wine Rooms, we're just giving customers the opportunity to taste and discover and I think that's wonderful. I'm really proud of what we're doing."

We'll definitely raise a glass to that!

Hattons is open Tuesday-Saturday from 8.30am-5pm
The Wine Rooms is open Tuesday-Saturday from 2-11pm

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WE HEARD IT ON THE GRAPE VINE

LISA HATTON GIVES SO THE LOWDOWN ON HER INTERIORS INSPIRATION FOR THE WINE ROOMS

"We knew from the start that we wanted to create a feeling of elegance and comfort as soon as you entered into The Wine Rooms. The bar was always going to be the main feature, however we wanted to surround it with sumptuous velvets, sensational lighting, warm oak surfaces and stand-out pieces, whilst celebrating the original features such as the flooring, the staircase, exposing the bricks on the chimney breasts and uncovering the beautiful windows and shutters.

I have worked with Caroline

Pickering from Style My Home before and knew she would be the person who would pull all of our ideas together. Caroline just understands. She creates a sense of calm by helping manage the project, creating wonderful mood boards and sourcing products. She finds a solution to any problem that may arise and has a firm hand when it comes to making decisions! There were many late night and early morning emails and site visits but we all worked really well together and we were over the moon with the end result.

