

THE PASS

WEST • GOLBORNE WINE & DELI

A night at The Deli

Words by Fred Chambers

I'm planning a quiet night in when a late afternoon message from Sam hits: 'Pre-shift pint? Swifty in the usual spot?' Ah. I said I'd have a quiet one - but the well-loved Aussie who presides over Golborne Wine & Deli is devilishly persuasive. To the pub we go.

20 minutes later, thanks to Guinness and tequila, 'just one' at the Deli suddenly feels like the polite thing to do. Within minutes of walking in, a familiar round of greetings takes place.

Alex, the charming Croatian owner, is just back from a trip to Champagne producer, Charles Heidsieck. Frankie, the endearing Sicilian sommelier, is glowing post-honeymoon. And Lizzie, one of the rare women on staff payroll, gets a hug and a customary 'still surviving the boys?' The 'reserved' sign outside on table 11 quietly disappears, and I take my usual spot. I hope they never gentrify enough to do away with the raggedy tables and semi-collapsing tent. A playlist akin to something heard in a cooler friend's living room hums in the background. The place is purring.

'Three glasses down and I haven't spent a penny. I'd better order a bottle of something nice.'

I scan the room and have to admit - my American friend was right. There's not a lot of body fat in this part of town. I break the crowd down into three types: urban Brits who are fantastically clueless about today's youth's property ladder struggles; beautiful, nondescript internationals displaying higher-than-average levels of vitamin D; and a few of the old-school 'Faces of the Cow' - legends from a different Golborne era who look like they have stories to tell. Laughing, joking, just...existing.

Hmm. What to start with? Would it be sacrilege to kick things off with a beer? Before I can decide, a chilled Croatian number lands on my table. 'Don't overthink this one - it's a crushable two-bottle BBQ vino', I'm told. One sip and I am easily sold. Anything from a lesser wine region must be seriously worthy to stand alongside the more typical, classical lineup of juices on offer. A dangerously good start.

Next. A delicate voting-age Burgundy - shared wordlessly by the Richard Gere doppelgänger seated on my left. Before too long, the American-Brazilian couple from the literal flat upstairs insist I try their naughty Georgian number. Between pours, we get into a passionate back and forth about a second site due to open around the corner in spring 2026 - united in hoping it won't mess with the magic here. Is it a bad thing that I've spoken more with them than most of my friends in the last six months? Fellow initiates. All in on the unspoken Golborne ways.

I do the maths while still lucid - three glasses down and I haven't spent a penny. I'd better order a bottle

of something nice. Meanwhile...I turn my attention to food. It's a decision between the off-menu poussin and the anchovy toast, which always comes with an extra dish of cold butter - a loyalty reward for my hours logged.

Mid-menu deliberation, I'm intercepted: 'Hey Fred, we've got an Australian winemaker in - fancy joining the tasting at the back?' Walking into the shop, I chuckle at the performative spittoon in the middle of the table. Isn't it illegal to spit when it's dark outside? The night rolls on, as they usually do here. Needless to say, I never did get that quiet night in. ■