

We have a famous phrase in France 'mettre les petits plats dans les grands'.

This is a phrase that you may not have heard before but not because it is obscure and difficult to translate but rather because it is only used on very special occasions.

'Mettre les petits plats dans les grands' is directly translated as 'put the little dish in the bigger one' but what it really means is that you are ready to dust off and use your best china.

I am sure that families all across France and Great Britain will be embracing this phrase this Christmas. This month I will divulge my perfect Christmas which I hope will give you a very special 'mettre les petits plats dans les grands' occasion.

Like many children growing up, Christmas was all about presents. I feel as I got older that my priorities changed and now, especially with the recent birth of my beautiful daughter, Christmas is all about family, friends and of course sharing fantastic food and wine.

One of my most powerful memories of Christmas was being invited to the depths of the cellar for an initiation ceremony with all the men in the household.

This ceremony was the opening of the fresh oysters while sharing of course a bottle of Muscadet de Sevre et Maine sur Lie. This wine gave a fresh, mineral taste which is a perfect match for the salty ocean taste of the oysters.

Later on Christmas Day (after all the hard work) the oysters are shared with the whole family along with a bottle of Champagne.

A lovely Champagne I would recommend is Laurent Perrier ultra Brut because it has no sugar added at any stage and makes a guilt free, low calorie aperitif. I know this is a French tradition but in terms of a food and wine experience that brings family and friends together at Christmas it is second to none.

Like me, many of you this Christmas will be having fresh Cumbrian smoked salmon. I think the perfect wine for this would be a dry aromatic Riesling which gives a contrast to the smoky and rich flavour of the salmon.

A goose is my choice this year for my main course, roasted and slowly cooked for a couple of days, which will take away the dryness and will make it confit.

I believe a perfect wine for this is a French Syrah from the Rhone Valley. The wine is called Cote Rotie from the organic vineyard M.Chapoutier and gives a full bodied style with a fruity and spicy character, bringing a powerful flavour to the soft and savoury dish.

Since working at Sharrow Bay I have replaced my traditional Christmas pudding with the original

Sharrow Bay sticky toffee pudding, although I still don't know the recipe! To have the full Sharrow Bay experience I add both vanilla ice cream and cream to the dish. I would recommend a sherry, which I know is a famous British drink, to go with a famous British dessert. The PX (Pedro Ximenez) grape variety is a very sweet version and tastes like a complex Christmas pudding in a liquid form. It's a great partner for this real treat.

Living in both France and England I have picked up what I believe is the best of both Christmases. I hope my happy Christmas experiences will help in giving you a special 'mettre les petits plats dans les grands'.

Joyeux Noël

Nico