

Seven Days

What to do in your area

**GIG | Aquilo**

The Oval Space, Bethnal Green

Tom Higham and Ben Fletcher bring their soft, calm electro pop to east London. Lancashire flavoured.

Apr 19, 7pm, £14

**STAGE | The Carny Dream**

Wilton's Music Hall, Wapping

Camille O'Sullivan performs the songs of Brel, Cave, Radiohead, Bowie and more.

Until Apr 21, 8pm, from £10

**STAGE | David Lowe**

The Troxy, Limehouse

Revel in the sounds of the mighty Wurlitzer as David explores the one-man orchestra in full.

Apr 17, 6pm, £15

**SOON | 100 Years Of Jazz**

The Troxy, Limehouse

In the UK, apparently. And what better way to celebrate than by skanking until 2am at this "festival"?

Apr 27, 8pm, £27.50

tasting tipples

before buying the bottles

Laura Enfield

It was a fateful trip to Portugal that led Andrea O'Keeffe and husband James Hilton to quit their jobs in banking.

After tasting a particularly special bottle of wine for four Euros, the Limehouse couple began wondering how they could share their discovery back home.

"James said people in the local supermarket wouldn't buy an unknown wine from Portugal," said Andrea.

"I said it be great if we could get a glass of wine to people to taste because you know the moment you put it in your mouth and swallow whether you like it or not.

"That is when the idea was born."

Four years later they launched Love A Taste, a wine subscription service that allows six new vintages from around the world to land on customers' doormats each month.

To avoid the irritation of missed deliveries and money spent on a bottle that isn't to a customer's taste, they decant each wine into specially designed 125ml samplers, allowing their packages to fit through letterboxes.

A monthly subscription costs £21 with free delivery and means customers can try a glass of each in the comfort of their home before deciding whether to shell out for a full bottle or case from the website.

"The reason we felt the idea had legs was because we felt it solved a problem," said Andrea.

"When you go to the supermarket, so many people pick wine by the prettiest label or a grape they recognise.

"They go home and pour it in a glass and you might like it, you might not. But until you open it, you don't know.

"Then, often, if you go back a week later to get more, it might be sold out.

"We wanted to be able to let people test wines that would never be bad and choose ones that their tastebuds like and save a lot of money by not buying six big bottles."

The wine samplers, which can also be bought as one-off gifts, are all from smaller producers not found in supermarkets and are accompanied by extensive notes in "simple English" and a tasting wheel so

Love A Taste subscription service gives customers the chance to try a range of fantastic wines before splashing out

people can find similar flavours.

They are hunted out by two masters of wine, Andy Howard and Johnny Brownsdon.

"They have been critical to us," said Andrea. "There are only 370 masters of wine in the world, they are rarer than astronauts. They try hundreds of wines each month and bring us 25 to taste and we then select six. Our focus is value for money so a £16 bottle has to be twice as good as an £8 one."

Andrea spent 30 years in banking before quitting her job with JP Morgan in Canary Wharf in July 2014 and having a year off.

'Serial entrepreneur' James has previously created a mobile phone game and a software business and also worked as an engineer, consultant and in banking.

He quit his job with Rothschild the day before the couple launched Love A Taste.

"Being an entrepreneur is new to me and it is a very different mindset," said Andrea.

"Banking is a very controlled environment - trying to achieve the best you can within certain parameters.

"Being an entrepreneur is a much more random process. There is no-one to fix the computer if it goes wrong and it is all those little things you don't think about in a big business that can stop you functioning in a small one."

The couple run Love A Taste from their Limehouse home and a business space in Suffolk, where they meticulously rebottle the vintages using a machine they designed and built.

"It is a hugely fragile process," said

Andrea, "because if the wine comes into contact with any air, the oxygen in it changes its nature

"We spent a lot of time, blood, sweat and tears making it an oxygen-free process, which was very tricky, and going through the chemical process to make sure the wines weren't affected by anything like disinfectants."

At first they ordered 10,000 plastic pouches from China to post the wine in but found they ruined the taste. Then they found a company in the UK that could make them flattened plastic bottles and put them through rigorous tests to ensure they would keep their integrity in transit.

The couple, both 53, have invested hundreds of hours and thousands of

pounds of their own money into making the business a success, travelling to markets and fairs across the country each week to promote it. They hope to be breaking even or in profit by the end of this year.

"Everything is a lot slower than in a big business," said Andrea. "It is a constant balancing act and we have to delineate our private and working life

because it is easy to find yourself still talking about work at 10pm and that can be exhausting.

"It's very different working with someone to be being married to them. I've had to have a word with him about swearing!

"But because our skills are very different, in many respects it's been fine.

"You do find yourself having low grade disputes but you have to snap out of it and get on and do the day job."

Go to loveataste.com for more information

