# Myperfectweekend

# Muddy walks and trips to the wine cellar

Cricket is not quite an all-year-round job, or at least not my particular part of it, so when I'm not working my weekends are there to be enjoyed. Friday night is a nice time to get

hold of nearby friends for a dinner party. My wife, Thorunn, is an excellent cook so she focuses on the food and I lay the table and concentrate on the wine. It usually means a delve into the cellar, and what I choose depends on our guests. I hope this doesn't sound terrible, but if I know there are people coming who really enjoy their wine, then I'll make a bigger effort to find something slightly different, a bottle to savour and exchange notes on. But I wouldn't like to be a cheapskate or a bad host, so I'll always make sure there is something drinkable.

One of my favourite wines at the moment is Vondeling, made by my cousin Richard in South Africa. It's a lovely wine that comes in handy because it's both delicious and good value. That's particularly useful when you have people glugging away - despite the health columns advocating moderation, if you stick people of a certain age together around a table then of course they'll drink too much. Normally we're all done by about 1am, but there does occasionally come a moment when I look around the room wondering how I'm going to get rid of this mob. If I've really had enough the answer is simple turn the tap off.

There's actually a very good synergy between cricket and wine. The two seem to go hand in hand - at any Test match there are champagne corks being popped onto the outfields and people with hampers full of rosé. Sadly, those who are working have to wait until the end of the day: there are strict no

alcohol rules until after play.
On Saturdays, the dog gets involved.
His name is Ollie. I originally wanted to call him Bolly, as in the champagne,

because he's the right colour and has an effervescent personality, but my daughters said it was silly. They were too young in those days to understand Bolly properly, so we settled for Ollie instead. Both the girls are away a fair amount now – Alex is 21 and at Bristol University doing Biology, and Sammi, who is 18, is doing a season in Val d'Isère running a ski chalet. Ollie never gets more cuddles and attention than when they're back.

We're nicely placed for dog walks on the edge of our village in Hampshire. If you turn left out of the gate and up what we call "the muddy lane", you've got lovely fields and woods with the odd rabbit and pheasant. If we make the effort to go 10 minutes in the car there's New Forest, too, which is a beautiful area, ideal for walking dogs as long as you don't scare the horses.

### I prefer to watch cricket at a sporting venue as the atmosphere is half the fun

Back at home I might need to keep an eye on the cricket. It seems that at any moment in life someone, somewhere is playing cricket and I have an obligation to stay properly informed. I don't watch too much at home – with dogs to walk, daughters to sort out and a wife to appease there isn't much time - and I also much prefer to watch cricket at a sporting venue because the atmosphere is half the fun, but I take a vague interest in the news.

The girls aren't particularly bothered by the game and if I want to get rid of them, I send them out shopping. Now that they can both drive, I've managed to negotiate that they don't need me to come and traipse around Topshop or John Lewis as well. That leaves me with space at home so I can do essential research - such as the crossword.

If I do need to work, I have a little



Dog days: David Gower and Ollie, who has plenty of options for a wal

## David Gower, 57, former English cricketer and Sky Sports commentator



#### In short

- O Herbal tea or stiff drink? Stiff drink.
- Worst habit Prevarication.
- Cast meal? It changes by the day, but roast beef.
- What are you First Among Sequels by Jasper Fforde, It's a little bit too clever for me, but brilliant.
- O Dream dinner Cate Blanchett.
- change in your career? It would have been nice to have actually won a World Cup. England have yet to

One thing you'd

office in a separate extension from the house. It has a magnificent set of speakers so in order to concentrate I can play whatever music helps me along at whatever volume helps me along, much like a recalcitrant teenager.

Of course, as you read this I'll be having a slightly different Saturday to usual. When Valentine's Day clicked in at midnight I'll have been getting up to work at Sky – we are hosting and presenting the Cricket World Cup from London this year. Then at midday I'll be getting back into bed in order to do it all again the following night. My schedule means I often miss things like birthdays and Valentine's Day and we're pretty good at rescheduling them, but at this stage of life I think a nice bottle of champagne and a lovely meal will do it.

Sundays are usually a day to charge the batteries, especially from the girls' point of view. They don't usually get up particularly quickly in the mornings. We might do a roast in the evening or a late lunch in the pub - the Wheatsheaf, in our village, is very good for a quick meal. If you're feeling sprightly you can walk there and then stagger back. People sometimes approach me for a chat when I'm out but in this stage of one's career it's normally quite friendly because they've forgotten all your disasters. The cricket fan is largely a friendly beast, but if fans aren't happy you can sometimes bear the brunt of their anger. I imagine Alastair Cook will have done so this year, undeservedly.

Family time on Sundays is always important because in this frenetic world there aren't that many opportunities for it. I'm trying to educate the girls about wine, and they're quite enthusiastic about that - less so about gardening, one of the other activities we try and get them involved in. My wife is managing director of gardens and looking after ours has been one of her passions. We coerce the girls into trimming the edges of the lawn every now and then and I confess that I find mowing the lawn very therapeutic for an hour or so.

In the evenings movies come into play, and we all love that. We have three places to watch - the snug, the bigger sitting room or the barn that's all set up with proper screens. The barn is so far away – all of 40 yards -that no one can be bothered to use it, which is a shame, but on a dark winter Sunday night there's nothing better than lighting the fire, settling on the sofas and watching a film.

#### My favourite things

- The David Shepherd painting Rhino in the Kaokoveld
- Richard MacDonald's bronze sculpture Diana
- My music collection
- My wine cellar My MacBook
- Sky Sports is showing the Cricket World Cup,

Barclays Premier League, Capital One Cup, F1 and the Ashes