

# Travels with my pashmina

The tiny ball that opens up to the size of a small blanket.

By Annalisa Barbieri

When pashminas came into fashion about ten years ago, you'd have thought the world had never heard of a shawl before, which is all that a pashmina actually is. Because I am so contrary, I avoided buying one for ages, as I did not want to seem to be following a trend. By the time I did, they had become very passé, and so I felt safe.

A really good-quality pashmina should be 100 per cent cashmere (pashmina is a type of cashmere). But, to keep prices down, the shawls are now often mixed with silk, which also adds strength – although cashmere is one the lightest and warmest fibres you can get, it is weak. My pashmina was incredibly thin, so much so that you could scrunch it up into a little ball and shove it in a bag; yet, when you pulled it out, it was the size of a small blanket. (And no, it was not an illegal shahtoosh, made from Tibetan antelope fur.) It sounds the stuff of glossy magazine talk to say it was great to take when travelling, but it really

was, not only because of the warmth it imparted (I could literally feel the heat it trapped the moment it rested on me), but also because it is immensely comforting to have something luxurious but practical with you in unfamiliar surroundings.

I wore my pashmina on all my winter fishing trips over the seven years I was a fishing correspondent and sometimes, on really bitter days in Scotland, I'd use it to balaclava up my face. It was a fantastic companion. But sadly I got a bit too gung-ho with putting it in the handwash cycle of my washing machine. It has now fallen apart, though it is intact enough to be of use, and my daughter loves to be wrapped "in Mummy's special blanket" while sitting on her beanbag watching *SpongeBob*.

Pashminas make wonderful gifts for new parents. Despite seeming like high-maintenance presents, they actually are not, because you really can put them in a good handwash machine cycle. I just did mine a bit too often, to get rid of fish detritus. A pashmina can be used unfolded in warmer weather

as a baby blanket, but when the weather cools down you just fold it to make it thicker and warmer. Nothing can beat it. When you get up to feed a baby during the night, a pashmina is the most wonderfully comforting thing to wrap around you and the child. They are also fantastically useful for weddings, as they provide warmth with style and no bulk.

For ages, I thought what an unbelievable luxury a new pashmina would be, even though I still use my tattered one almost every day, and even though I spend more than the cost of a fairly good pashmina on food each week. Finally, today, I decided that as it's my birthday month, I deserve one. I shuddered with the decadence of it as I ordered one in purple, the colour of egomaniacs. ●



**A shawl that has everything: pashminas can be used as baby blankets or worn at weddings for warmth with style**

## DRINK

# Halfway house

There are times when you want just half the bottle. Roger Scruton looks at what's on offer

An unfinished bottle of white wine can be recorked and returned to the fridge, and a bottle of red provides such a genial accompaniment to a meal that it seems mean-minded not to finish it. Nevertheless, there are occasions when a half-bottle is needed – for instance, when you want to make a point of showing how little you drank while she was out. There is no better accompaniment to a solitary sandwich than a half-bottle of Burgundy, and a half-bottle of Sauternes rounds off a dinner for two far better than any pudding.

However, now that everything is bottled at source, it is rare that a producer will think it worthwhile to deal in halves, and very few merchants are able to stock them. Without wishing to be dogmatic in the matter (wishing to keep my abundant dogmatism for more important things), I would say that every decent cellar should contain a case or two of halves, and that

they should be of a quality to justify their somewhat precious appearance. There should be good, crisp white Burgundy, to whet the appetite for that special dinner for two. There should be full, fruity red Burgundy to confront those moments of solitary defeat. And there should be a solid and aromatic dessert wine to bring the end-of-dinner moment to its crisis.

I am pleased to say that Corney & Barrow has risen to the challenge. You should bear in mind that half-bottles age more quickly than whole bottles, so the three young wines on offer are in fact already fully mature. The *premier cru* Montagny from Olivier Leflaive has all the endearing qualities of that often undervalued region: a pronounced acidity, slight sweetness, and rounded fruit that lingers on the palate. As a long-standing lover of Montagny, I would give this one full marks.

Just as good in its own way is Leflaive's Chablis, which, as its name suggests, is a blend of grapes

from both banks of the Serein River. This has a grassy aroma, a bracing attack, a flinty finish and the depth and complexity of a *premier cru*.

Concerning the Gamay grape, I am inclined to agree with Philip the Bold, who banned it from his dukedom of Burgundy. But this example from Moulin-à-Vent quite took me aback with its richness and perfume – the best Beaujolais I have tasted in a long time, and a perfect accompaniment to a solitary steak-and-kidney pie. It is not cheap, but worth the price: take a taste of this and you will never touch Beaujolais Nouveau again.

The Monbazillac is a fully mature dessert wine, which has lost none of its freshness during its six years in bottle. At 13 per cent, it is slightly weaker than most Sauternes, but its forward sweetness, velvety finish and aroma of roasted almonds make it a credible rival. It is a wine that will last and, at this price, is a real bargain. ●



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