

Morocco, dark hash from India and herbal marijuana from Afghanistan, all at various prices and weights.

The Club charges around 20 per cent more than street dealers, but in return offers quality, reliability and safety. Like sommeliers, waitresses respond to queries on the origin and effects of the drugs. When the drugs arrive, they are in small see-through bags, with coloured labels corresponding to each drug on the menu, to avoid confusion.

There are rules, which are strictly adhered to. The Club is for over-21s and limits how often and how much you can buy. Members must also snort, smoke or swallow some of their purchased drugs while they are inside the venue to prove they are genuine users – this is to put off police and journalists. To join you must wait six months and have the backing of two existing members.

According to Sophie, 'Most people who come here have jobs and are in control of their drug use.' She adds: 'I don't think politicians, who love a drink themselves, should be telling adults what we should be putting in our bodies.'

A survey into drug use carried out by the Global Drug Survey, *The Guardian* and *MixMag* in 2012 unearthed a largely hidden population

of middle-class people who were young and confident, but happy to break the law by taking drugs. This group was highly educated, working, sociable and sporty – and far more likely to get high than the average citizen. In fact, government statistics show that there is a higher proportion of people earning more than £50,000 who take drugs than those on more modest salaries.

Yet with all artificial highs come the lows. Cocaine and ecstasy are dangerous substances. Both can be fatal and cocaine can be highly addictive. Drug-takers snorting a line or popping a mystery pill also give little thought to the toxic underground labs that produce their drug, nor the violence and coercion that is attached to supply lines. For many, taking drugs is an indiscretion no worse than most, while for some it is an act that should be controlled rather than outlawed.

Last year Sam Branson, son of Sir Richard, launched *Breaking The Taboo*, in which current and former world leaders such as Bill Clinton called for an end to the war on drugs. The film called for legalised drug use based on strict regulation, with government – rather than gang – control over both the production and sale of drugs. But

others argue this would legitimise and popularise drug use, creating a society that would spiral out of control.

Occasionally the police threaten clampdowns on middle-class users. Sir Ian Blair chose his first day as the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner in 2005 to issue a stark warning to arrest affluent dinner-party cocaine-snorters. But the crackdown never came. In January this year, the current Met

Commissioner, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, again set his sights on middle-class drug users by calling for drug testing at work.

“BUYING DRUGS IS SIMPLY PART OF MY SHOPPING ITINERARY”

Whichever path Britain edges towards, one thing has become clear to me from my journey into Britain's drug world. The sale and use of drugs is embedded within our society, from council-estate crack dens to trendy salons, narcotic speakeasies and five-star hotel suites. Others would disagree, but after three years' research, talking to people across the whole arena, I was left with the conclusion that the drive to get high and make money from drugs is a powerful force that cannot be denied. Recreational drug use is a personal call and is too widespread and too mainstream to be halted by the law. In my view, the best a society can do is to focus on educating people about drugs and to offer help, not punishment, to those whose lives have been damaged by them.

Meanwhile, women like Becky, who works in social media and lives in London with her partner and young son, will carry on buying and taking drugs in her own, particularly female, organised way. 'If I want to buy something for the weekend, a friend's birthday or a music festival, I'll just text my dealer a few days before. I stock up like I would on anything. If there is a good supply of ecstasy around I'll buy 20 pills and keep them high up in the secret box at the top of the wardrobe.'

Ultimately it's just another thing to tick off her list. She adds: 'Buying drugs is simply part of my shopping itinerary, like buying a pair of knickers.' ■



All names have been changed