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18 Jun 2024

English wine hits a milestone

England's wine industry is booming, and with its maturation has come as many growing pains as there are great wines. Tam surveys both.

The first book on English (UK) wine that ever landed on my desk for review was Liz Sagues' slender *A Celebration of English Wine* in late 2018. In my opening paragraph of that review, I wrote: 'not much in the way of books has been available on wine in Great Britain since Hugh Barty-King and Don Philpott published their books way back in 1989.'

I now have 10 books on UK wine taking up a respectable chunk of my bookshelf, including Henry Jeffreys' brilliant and deliciously gossip-snippy *Vines in a Cold Climate*, which won the Fortnum & Mason's Drink Book of the Year 2024. How things have changed in just five years.

What's most interesting is that the formerly much-emphasised themes of extreme climate and comparisons with Champagne's chalk soils have given way to much more interesting conversations about green sandstone, clay, generational dynasties, biodynamic viticulture, clonal diversity, cover crops, female winemakers, pet-nats, spontaneous fermentation, amphorae and egos. The other hot (if not literally) and somewhat contentious topic is terroir.

Crouch Valley, Essex – arable land waiting to be planted with vineyards

Despite the creation of a Sussex PDO in 2022 (you can read some of the background and controversy surrounding that in Jancis's article, *English wine – a still future?*), there is still very little grip on regional terroir, simply because we haven't been growing wine grapes seriously or long enough to collect sufficient, reliable data on which soils and which sites work best for which varieties. That the climate has been inexorably changing over the last two decades complicates things further. That we are a small island, surrounded by five different bodies of water as varied as the cold North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean bringing the warm Gulf Stream/North Atlantic Drift means that soil composition may play the

supporting act to maritime weather systems, and mesoclimates are much more relevant than regional climates. County boundaries, political not geographical lines drawn up in many cases centuries ago, are also not helpful.

It is also the case that a number of well-known brands buy grapes from all over the country, so although they might state a county on the label, all the fruit does not necessarily come from that county. The other argument against trying to nail down terroir into PDO regulations is that most of the vineyards are converted farmland (which could range from chemically and physically eroded arable to rich, fertile pasture) and they are very young. It will take decades before we can really begin to draw up the lines of PDOs ... and by then half the vineyards may be under the sea!

Nick Speakman, Missing Gate Vineyard

Recently I had an email conversation with Nick Speakman of Missing Gate Vineyard (pictured above). We were talking about their two 2022 Pinots (named Two Horse Land and Three Horse Land) which really were outstanding, and their decision to bottle the parcels separately. Speakman's anecdote about the wine names works, in a small way, to illustrate what I am trying to say about the complexity of newly converted farmland 'terroir':

'I am not sure that I have explained the "Horse Principle" to you previously. If I have, I apologise for the next paragraphs.

'Traditionally in the 1800s with the onset of the iron ploughshare and mouldboard, land in our region began to be described (informally) according to the number of horses required to pull one share. In most of the local low-lying Crouch Valley region the land is described as one horse. This then changes with elevation as you move upwards out of the lower reaches from the alluvial topsoil of a decent depth to the igneous-based clay paste that we have with little or no topsoil covering which needs more horses. It is the same today with larger tractors needed to work our land which makes it less sustainable leading to change in practice, hence vines.

'We believe to have found a correlation between the horses required and the depth/variations of flavours in grapes, probably derived by stress response and the uptake of different nutrients from our igneous-based soils compared to those available in alluvial soils. This associated with John Atkinson's "Smectite Principle" of increased water-holding capacity and slow moisture release may lead to some of the different characteristics that are found in MGV wines in

many years. (Montmorillonite smectite was detected early at surface level in the southern Loire Valley with a lower depth band over much of mid/southern France). We will be doing further work with Nottingham and Adelaide Universities digging into this and testing the theory.

‘When we first set out to create a vineyard, our kindly neighbours advised us to make our rows at least 3 metres wide so that large tractors could be used to subsoil at the correct speed and depth to break up the compaction of soils caused by frequent mechanical interventions of spraying, trimming, leaf pulling, etc. I decided that we should go as wide as possible to 3.3 metres [10.8 ft] to allow for the maximum lateral root growth before the barrier created by compacted wheel-marking inhibited further movement. It was clear that the vines would not be able to sink deep roots as the soils are devoid of oxygen and impermeable at below a metre except in very dry years so sideways was the only option and that was the maximum row width that sprayers could reach.

‘Additionally, I felt that this was the most sustainable planting density based on our poor soil quality and the need to have as much uninterrupted sun and best air and frost drainage which would result in lower disease pressure and therefore fewer chemical interventions. I am questioning the decision to change to 3 metre rows on our latest 35 acres [14 ha] of planting. Only time will tell.’

And that’s it: only time will tell. We’ve hit a grown-up milestone as a wine-producing country: we’re producing great wines, good wines, boring wines and terrible wines (like every wine-producing country). But let’s not rush to regulate. There’s still plenty of time and space for learning and experimentation. And as wine drinkers, let’s do the same by drinking widely and with an open mind, investing in the winemakers doing excellent work as they explore their terroir.

Ripe Pinot Noir and sunshine – yes, this really is England

In the 68 tasting notes below – including a handful from Julia and Jancis – I try to specify which English county each wine comes from (although many brands buy grapes from all over the country) so that we can start to get a feel for the geographical reach of wine from this cool island. The wines are grouped by style (sparkling, still) and colour (white, pink, red) and are ordered by producer (sur)name. You can reorder by score if you prefer.

Select sorting option ▼

White sparkling

Ashling Park, South Downs Sussex Cuvée Brut NV England

15.5

Full bottle 1,609 g. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier from the estate's West Sussex vineyards.

Toasty, and very much a wine that tastes more of the process of making champagne than of vineyards or fruit. Apricots, apples and smoked chestnuts. A bit short but would outshine many mainstream champagnes at this price. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2026

£30 RRP The Whisky Exchange, Tanners, Grape Britannia, Cork, Ashling Park Estate

Ashling Park, South Downs Sussex Blanc de Blancs Brut 2014 England

17

Full bottle 1,611 g. 100% Chardonnay grown on West Sussex vineyards.

Toasty croissant and lime-blossom nose. Plenty of lime-marmalade sweetness and hazelnut-praline, chestnut-butter richness. This is pretty impressive. The fruit is ripe, dense and concentrated. There is almost certainly quite a bit of dosage, but it works well in this brocaded, gleaming, hedonistic wine that is clearly made to seduce. A sparkling wine that immediately makes me want a slice of sweet, nutty Comté. Very well priced! (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2034

£36.99 RRP The General Wine Company, Woodwinters, Camber Wines, Ashling Park Estate

Black Chalk, Paragon Brut 2020 England

17.5

Full bottle 1,627 g. 100% Chardonnay from clones 95, 121, 76, 131, hand-picked from the Upper Level vineyard of their Hampshire estate. Each clone was picked and vinified separately, 54% in stainless steel and 46% in a new 2,300-litre oak foudre. No fining, no enzymes, no malo. 26 months sur lattes. Dosage 5.9 g/l, TA 8.8 g/l, pH 2.9, total added sulphites 64 mg/l.

The soft drift of smokiness on the nose did not prepare me for the cascade of fruit in this Blanc de Blancs – the very polar opposite of the usual English BdB severity. The overture is a crescendo of citrus, clementine sweetness turning to bergamot

fragrance to pomelo piquancy and then a curlicue of blood orange. And then, the mid palate rounds into richness, becoming almost tropical, even hinting at mango, and developing a subtle, seductive praline undertone. The filigree lacework of bubbles is like snowflakes under a microscope. Through it all, the acidity glitters like a thousand tiny sweet-lime stars, finding every molecule of space, a galaxy of electric energy. And then, after leaving a long, long trail, it signs off with a sigh of smoke. It's stunning. Quite simply stunning. (TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2032

£65 producer's website

Black Chalk, Inversion 777 Brut 2020 England

17.5

Full bottle 1,623 g. 83% Pinot Noir, 17% Pinot Meunier from clones 777 (the majority), 386, 521, 817, hand-picked from the Upper Level vineyard of their Hampshire estate. Each clone is picked and vinified separately. Clone 777, winemaker Zoe Driver tells me (with her eyes shining), is amazing: powerful, robust, very expressive. No fining, no malo. 97% stainless steel, 3% old French oak (just one barrel). Dosage 6.3 g/l, TA 7.8 g/l, pH 2.9, total added sulphites 59 mg/l. Bottle number one of 1,939 bottles produced.

In striking contrast to its Blanc de Blancs stablemate, this Black Chalk Blanc de Noirs is first of all a story of texture, and baritone pitch. It has the deep-gravel voice of a storyteller by the fireside. The tempo is slower, more measured, more thoughtful. It's the adagio to the Paragon's allegro. The soft husk of roasted chestnuts, hazelnut and Sichuan pepper precedes the fruit, and the fruit is red, it's cherry, it's blood-orange pith, it's fresh strawberries tossed with black olives. It's chiaroscuro underpinned by a purr of bitterness and the bubbles are fine and so silky you could wear them to bed. (TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2034

£65 producer's website

Bluestone, Premier Cuvée Brut 2019 England

16

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,588 g. Wiltshire. 48.5% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir, 18.5% Meunier. 93% from 2019, 7% from reserve wines. Tirage 9 September 2020, disgorged 6 November 2023. Established in 2016 by brothers Nathaniel and Toby McConnell. The background sent to me says: 'the brothers work alongside Chef de Cave Hervé Jestin, formerly Champagne Duval-Leroy and now Champagne Leclerc Briant, to make the award-winning wines at Hambledon. The Bluestone team has a holistic approach to

regenerative farming and takes a minimal intervention approach. Targeted spraying, the use of cover crops, to encourage biodiversity and build healthier soils, and spore capture are all part of the current management of the vineyard. Future plans include the potential integration of livestock in the vineyards – a move towards grazing-based viticulture. Sustainability is a core value for the wine producer; the estate is solar powered and a borehole supplies naturally filtered spring water, whilst a pond and reed bed supports waste management. Planted in 2016, the 10-acre site comprises 58% Chardonnay, 32% Pinot Noir and 10% Pinot Meunier producing 25,000 bottles annually. The south and south-west-facing vineyards on the edge of Salisbury Plain, are made up of sandy, clay loam soils. Naturally high in organic matter, the nutrient-rich soil balances and retains moisture, draining excess water freely through the underlying chalk. The topsoil depth varies considerably on the slopes, from 3 cm to 100 cm deep, affecting fertility, water and soil temperature and lending different characteristics to the grapes.'

A new name to me. It has a very creamy, pillowy, brioche-and-warm-butter topped-with-lemon-curd nose. Big, bold, loose bubbles. And just as I was about to write that it was brioche and butter on the palate too, I was stopped by a blade of lemon-laser acidity which sliced with dazzling speed through any notions of richness. Smoked orange peel and bitter papaya seeds on the finish. It's bracing but full of flavour and crack-snapping the air with energy. Just fabulous with a nutty-sweet aged Gruyère. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£45 producer's website

Candover Brook, Brut 2019 England

16

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,599 g. Hampshire. Lord Sainsbury and his sons Mark and Julian have planted vines on the family's estate. 58% Chardonnay, 28% Pinot Noir and 14% Pinot Meunier. Aged for a minimum of 42 months on lees. 97% from 2018 and 3% of reserve wine. Winemaking is overseen by consultant ex-Champagne winemaker Hervé Jestin. Disgorged 20 January 2023.

This really has lovely balance. Not 'too' anything, albeit a teeny bit short. It smells just like a freshly made stollen studded with candied citrus peel and nuts. Tiny, fierce bubbles. Bitter grapefruit peel, quinine and a salty finish. Racy and piercing. Bitter orange on the finish. As it warmed in the glass, some peachiness developed. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£37 RRP producer's website, Philgas & Swiggott, The Naked Grape, The Wine Yard

Denbies, Sparkling Bacchus NV England

15

Full bottle 1,338 g. Carbonated.

This was the singularly most difficult-to-open bottle of sparkling wine that I have ever come across. It took my very (very) experienced-at-opening-fizz husband, who is over 6 foot tall and very strong, more than half an hour, a pair of rubber Marigold gloves, a pair of plumber's pliers and a corkscrew to get the wine open. We were beginning to contemplate sabrage – which seems a bit overkill for a bottle of £12 carbonated Bacchus! Does Denbies want to discourage their customers from drinking it? It is exactly what it says on the tin, sorry, bottle: 'aromatic and floral fizz'. Simple, slightly sweet, not too fizzy and with light elderflower flavour. A bit like soda water with the merest splash of elderflower cordial. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024

£11.96 producer's website

Exton Park, Blanc de Noirs Brut 2014 England

17

100% Pinot Noir from one plot on the estate's sunny south-eastern slopes, on limestone near Winchester in Hampshire. It is six years since Exton Park last released this cuvée. Seven years on the lees, no malo and no oak influence. RS 6 g/l. Disgorged 2022.

Smells like a fresh brioche filled with tangy lemon cream, with ripe-red-apple notes. On the palate, this is intensely fresh and has all that mouth-watering crisp-apple flavour and a long, fresh citrusy finish that is rounded out by the time on the lees to a creamy generosity in the texture. It has depth as well as enormous freshness and the fine mousse seems to spread that creamy texture around the palate. A hint of ginger and a light cedary note on the aftertaste. Complex flavours of bottle age and the purity of the chalk soils, though the lemony acidity of the English climate tends to dominate the finish. (JH) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

£65 producer's website

Exton Park, Blanc de Noirs Brut 2014 England

17

Full bottle 1,608 g. Fruit from the estate's Hampshire vineyards, 100% Pinot Noir. No malo, no oak ageing. Seven years on the lees, bottled 2015, disgorged 2022.

Dosage 6 g/l. Winemaker Corinne Seely, viticulturist Fred Langdale.

So exactly elegant, so precise, that I felt I should approach it with a set square, a metronome and a compass rather than a glass. It has a mathematical harmony, a pattern, a base-weight surety and crystalline, geometrical elegance that immediately fills the senses with the completion of 'this adds up'. The quiet, subtle notes of English pear and heirloom apple watercolour-brush into cool-summer dawn, acidity always there like a long, transparent, wasp-waisted hourglass, funnelling the length of the wine bead by bead. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2034

£65 producer's website

Fox & Fox, Mosaic Brut 2016 Sussex

16

50:50 Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Made at Bolney by Jonathan Fox. RS 8 g/l.

Quite a bit of age on the nose. Serious, ambitious wine. But not exactly a brisk aperitif ... You need to be a Bollinger fan. Pretty astringent on the end. 12%

Drink 2023 – 2024

£32 (2015) Amathus

Herbet Hall, Brut 2019 England

16

From a fourth-generation family farm in Kent. 40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 30% Meunier – vines planted in a single vineyard site in 2007. 10% of the base wine is fermented in oak barrels. Three and a half years sur lattes.

Tight and square and firm. Citric bitterness. Very focused but (wide blade) breadth down the middle. Good mouth-filling acidity, nothing screechy, nothing out of place. Chewy finish but fine bubbles. Appetising. (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2028

£39.50 Lea & Sandeman

Domaine Hugo, Botleys Col Fondo NV England

16

From a single-vineyard field blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Pinot Gris grown without pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers. Made from the final pressings of the Domaine Hugo sparkling. Fermented in barrel for 12 months. Bottled with a little of the lively ferment of the following vintage. Spontaneous fermentation, unfiltered, undisgorged, no added sulphites.

Cloudy yellow gold and a lot less frothy than most pet-nats. Full of quinine-

piqued pomelo and apple fruit. Tiny, lacy bubbles and clinquant, sherbety acidity. A bit like tonic water, in a good, thirst-quenching way. (TC) 10.5%

Drink 2024 – 2025

£32.80 161 Food & Drink

Domaine Hugo, Single Vineyard Brut Nature 2020 England

17

Certified organic (BDA) and biodynamic (Demeter). From Wiltshire, a 2-ha single-vineyard field blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Pinot Gris grown without pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers. Pressed slowly and co-fermented in old barrels, with indigenous yeasts. Élevage in barrel for 11 months before tirage with biodynamic Champagne Fleury yeast. Disgorged January 2022, zero dosage and zero added sulphites, unfinned and unfiltered.

Remarkable sweetness for a zero-dosage wine. Dry but not austere. Vibrantly bright, vivid, alacritous fruit. Quince, clementine and a zigzag of bergamot. A tight filigree of tiny bubbles. Generous in the way it fills the mouth, promising in the way it hints at honey and tiny yellow flowers. Long and fine. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

£53.60 161 Food & Drink

Knightor, Vintage Cuvée Brut 2014 England

17

Full bottle 1,612 g. 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay. Sur lattes for eight years.

Dosage 6 g/l.

Real cream-pie richness. Ample breadth and generosity, a seductive swirl of baked pear, apple pie and orange curd. The dosage isn't that high, but the wine has sweetness and density that transcends the numbers. The richness means you could easily pair this with afternoon tea ... strawberry shortcake, or scones piled with clotted cream and lemon marmalade. It would also be delicious with a triple-cream cheese or those tiny little cheesy sablés. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£43 producer's website

Langham, Corallian Classic Cuvée Brut NV England

17

88% Chardonnay. Estate-grown Dorset fruit.

Such a great nose! Apples and hay and pith piqued by bright-yellow lemon zest.

Green apple, gold apple, fino-esque nuttiness. I find it quite manzanilla-like ...

Then winemaker Tommy Grimshaw tells me that some of the blend comes from a

barrel which developed a flor. Salty and so damn delicious. It's not at all conventional, but it's not weird and it's not too off-piste. racy and complete. I love this. *And it's VGV.* (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2030

£31.95 Lea & Sandeman

Langham, Culver Classic Cuvée Brut NV England

17

Dorset estate-grown fruit. 65% Pinot Noir, 25% Chardonnay, 10% Pinot Meunier. Mostly based on 2020. Spontaneous fermentation in a mix of vessels. Dosage 3 g/l, disgorged January 2023.

Very different nose from the Corallian tasted just before. Cherry, stollen, marzipan. The palate has a golden-ness, a glow; nuts and autumn leaves steeped in nectarine juice and finished with an addictively bitter-sour-snap of apple and pear and lemon. Very tense on the finish. Tense and salty. Moreish! Also **VGV.** (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2028

£31.95 Lea & Sandeman

Langham, Blanc de Blancs Brut NV England

17

100% estate-grown Dorset fruit, farmed sustainably. Winemaker Tommy Grimshaw tells me that sometimes this wine is a vintage, sometimes not. All the base wines are made with spontaneous fermentation and Grimshaw works really oxidatively with neutral oak. Dosage is always low. Slightly lower pressure, 5 bar, 'so you can taste the wine'. 2019 was a wet year and they leant heavily on reserve wine (30%) which is stored in concrete tanks.

That is a beautiful nose! This could rival any grower champagne. The minerality is coruscating! Pixelated precision: a thousand crystals. Like crunching lemon salt, and yet the fruit is ripe and compelling. Love this wine. The finish is so good: woven and tense, racy and long. **GV** (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2030

£39.50 Lea & Sandeman

Nyetimber, Blanc de Blancs Brut 2016 England

16.5

100% Chardonnay from West Sussex and Hampshire. Bottled 23 March 2017 and disgorged 24 May 2023. TA 7.4 g/l, pH 3.2, RS 9.6 g/l.

Big bubbles on first pouring. Sweet-smelling citrus with a touch of white blossom as well as toasty autolytic notes and an inviting fruit ripeness. Deliciously toasty on

the palate as well as intensely fresh, a good balance of fruit depth, lees-aged creamy-rich and rounded texture as well as mouth-watering acidity. Mousse is much finer in the mouth than it appeared in the glass. Long, with masses of acidity and tension and really refined. The aftertaste seems a little sweet-sour, which brought my note down from 17 to 16.5. (JH) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£52 producer's website

Nyetimber, 1086 Brut 2014 England

17.5

51% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir, 9% Pinot Meunier from south-facing chalk and greensand slopes. TA 8.2 g/l, pH 3.22, RS 9.4 g/l. Bottled 19 April 2014, disgorged 9 February 2023.

Fine stream of very small bubbles. Smells richer and more biscuity than the Blanc de Blancs 2016 just tasted. Complex and deep with less citrus and blossom, perhaps a suggestion of lime purity. Even with the high acidity, this is broad and mouth-filling, with a light suggestion of tannin adding a little grip to the creamy texture. More savoury and broader than the Blanc de Blancs, full-flavoured and brilliantly fresh. Almost chewy on the finish. Powerful, long and harmonious, the residual sugar and the acidity seem better integrated than on the Blanc de Blancs 2016. (JH) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£150 producer's website

Oxney, Classic Brut 2019 England

16.5

Full bottle 1,641 g. Certified organic (Ecocert, Soil Association). East Sussex blend of Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay. 36 months on lees.

I notice that Oxney calls this wine 'Classic Brut' on their website and marketing materials but it doesn't have Classic on the label (just an FYI for those who might be confused, as I was). Long-limbed tension running through a broad-shouldered, confident display of burnished grapefruit, marmalade and roasted almonds.

Tamarind notes add tonality to the very firm swathe of acidity. The bubbles are loose and limber. Pure, crunchy, mouth-watering apple fruit on the finish. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2029

£38 RRP

Oxney, Blanc de Blancs 2019 England

17

Certified organic (Ecocert, Soil Association). 100% Chardonnay from different parcels throughout Oxney's vineyard. Each parcel was pressed and fermented separately, and then went through malolactic conversion. Some of the base wines are fermented and aged in older burgundy barrels. 36 months sur lattes. Dosage 3.2 g/l. TA 7.2 g/l, pH 3.06.

Lemon candy, lemon zest on the nose. Shells and chalk and shell dust. Bright and taut and super-mouth-watering – a wine that seems to crack in the mouth like cold lightning, zigzagging apple-green and pear-white and lemon-crunch from the tip of the tongue to the back of the throat. Just SO bright and delicious! Brilliant with food and this will evolve beautifully over the coming years. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2034

£41 producer's website

Roebuck Estates, Classic Cuvée Brut 2018 England

15.5 +

Full bottle 1,596 g. From three estate vineyards in West Sussex, near Petworth. 47% Chardonnay, 42% Pinot Noir, 11% Pinot Meunier. Hand-picked. 5% was fermented in used burgundian oak barrels. 48 months sur lattes, followed by six months in bottle after disgorging.

Smoky nose with a burnt-sugar crust and straight into very terse, arrow-like acidity. Whistling through its teeth. Yet there is notable sweetness on the finish. I wonder what the dosage is? Perhaps it hasn't quite integrated yet and needs a little more time in bottle. Spicy apples and smoked cream in the middle. Substantial enough for the dinner table. (TC) 12%

Drink 2025 – 2031

£38 RRP

Simpsons, White Cliffs Blanc de Blancs Brut 2019 England

14.5

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,652 g. 100% estate-grown Chardonnay. Due for release summer 2024.

This smells vegetal. Like boiled squash. Excruciating acidity. A huge hole in the middle, very short, and weird flavours. I wonder if there is something wrong with this? It just doesn't taste right. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024

£45 producer's website, various independents

Squerryes, Brut 2019 England

16

Roughly one-third each Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier, Pinot Noir from the Kent North Downs. All their own estate grapes. Dosage 5.5 g/l. Disgorged last year (2023) after three years on lees.

Strawberry nose! Lovely fruit. Expressive and friendly, showing more fruit than autolysis. But there is a ground-oats savouriness underlying the very very bright, crystal-cut apples and pears. Almost perry-like. Elegant, very balanced acidity.

Pretty good! (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2027

£37.95 Lea & Sandeman

Squerryes, Blanc de Blancs Brut 2015 England

16.5

Estate-grown fruit from the North Downs of Kent. 7.5 years sur lattes, dosage 7 g/l.

Rich nose, rich and smoky and lovely petrol notes running through, a kind of oily fatness and weight and then very, very firm, piercing acidity. Grilled grapefruit and bitter orange. Complex and interesting, showing elegant development. Dramatic and long. (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2028

£51.95 Lea & Sandeman

Sugrue South Downs, The Trouble With Dreams Extra Brut 2019 England

17.5 ++

70% Storrington Priory and 30% Coldharbour Vineyard fruit. 60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir. Sustainably farmed. Fermented and aged in a combination of large barrels and stainless steel. The initial release of this wine was disgorged in early January 2024. Dosage 6 g/l. 7,500 bottles produced.

The smoky, marine-scented aromas, like rain on windswept coastal cliffs, have goosebumps tingling down my neck before I've even sipped the wine. So racy it takes your breath away. White-knuckle tension, white-shell minerality, white stone fruit and long, long, sweet pithy tannins. Power in structure: salt-crusted verticality, a whisper of honey across the endless breadth. It feels like licking chiselled marble. Stern, high-cheek-bone beauty. There is so much tension in the wine that it feels like it might snap in your mouth; it feels like the crack of a whip splitting a white winter sky. I'd strongly urge laying this down for as long as you dare. If you drink it now, don't chill it as much as you might champagne and, if

you can, allow it to open in the glass. I've been tasting a very large number of top-notch grower champagnes recently and by comparison the Sugrue wines, every bit as good, are underpriced (for which read **VGV**). (TC) 12%

Drink 2025 – 2035

£49 producer's website

Westwell NV England

15.5

Full bottle 1,590 g. Fruit from Kent, multi-vintage wine (hence MV) from vintages 2019, 2020 and 2021. Whole-bunch pressed and spontaneous fermentation. No additions, zero dosage.

Edgily smoky, flinty, a hint of hard-boiled eggs. Smart edges, uncompromising edges, green-apple-skin edges. Fine prickly bead. Terse and briskly punctuated.

Perfect with a salty anchovy on hot buttered toast! (TC) 10.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

Westwell, Blanc de Blancs Zéro Dosage 2013 England

15.5

Full bottle 1,616 g. Kent vineyards, 100% Chardonnay. On secondary lees from summer 2014 to 2023. Zero dosage.

By god, this wine is uncompromising! If you love to suck lemons, this is your baby. The fizz is fine and its nine years of lees ageing have (she wipes her brow) softened (I think) the acidity. But believe me, there is a protestant ascetic aesthetic shaping this wine ... If your soul needs to be chiselled, drink long and deep.

Otherwise, I'd pull out the cassis and go down the kir route. I actually think this would have benefitted from dosage. It's a little *too* puritanical for me. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2030

Wiston, Blanc de Blancs Brut NV England

16.5

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. 100% Chardonnay, 80% from 2018. Fermented in stainless steel and 500-litre oak barrels from Burgundy. Disgorged 2 February 2023, dosage 9 g/l.

Banana cream and white blossoms on the nose. Quite an aggressive bead at first (when very cold), but eased back to reveal complexity and grace. Cream and grapefruit and lemon-zested panettone. There's a fullness, mid palate, which is nourishing and pleasing, before it tightens into a drawstring finish. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2029

£38 producer's website

Wiston, Brut NV England

16.5

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,599 g.

Disgorged 23 February 2023. Dosage 7 g/l. 35% Chardonnay, 35% Pinot Noir, 30% Pinot Meunier. 70% from 2017.

Big bubbles and distinctive on the nose – sourdough, chopped green apples.

Grilled walnuts, intense citrus, apricot and toasted hemp hearts. Real steely grip here. Cold butter and stones and long, structural strands of beautifully judged bitterness. Firm, no-nonsense finish. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£34 producer's website

Wiston, South Downs Blanc de Blancs Brut 2018 England

17.5

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,599 g. 100% Chardonnay from a single vineyard on the Wiston Estate. Fermented in old French barrels and stored for nine months before bottling. The wine was then aged for 3.5 years on lees. Disgorged 8 June 2023. Dosage 8 g/l.

This really stood out in the blind line-up for its beauty and slowly unfurling magnificence. At first, just-poured and cold, aromas of lemon curd and buttery flowers, and on the palate, as delicate as a daisy chain and just as pretty. Like fresh buttered scones bright with lemon zest and candied lemon peel. But as it warmed in the glass, it grew, deepened, became more sonorous. It was as if the flowery petals were dropping away, revealing hitherto unseen richness. This is outstanding. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2032

£58 producer's website

Rosé sparkling

Ashling Park, South Downs Sussex Rosé NV England

16

Full bottle 1,610 g. Blend of Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Made by Dermot Sugrue.

I'd love to know what the dosage is, how long it was on the lees and when it was disgorged. Partly because it tastes unusually sweet for a Sugrue wine. It's a golden-pink colour with plenty of candied citrus peel, lime marmalade and maraschino cherries – like panettone in a glass. Strawberry crème brûlée. A touch of Turkish

delight. Probably the perfect wine for strawberries piled with snowy mascarpone and lime-zested elderflower syrup. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£35 RRP The Whisky Exchange, The General Wines Company, Camber Wines, Hennings Wines, Ashling Park Estate

Birchden Vineyards, The Charmed Finch Sparkling Rosé Brut 2020 England

16

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,594 g. 100% Pinot Noir from East Sussex fermented in stainless steel with a small percentage of red wine blended in before bottling. Sur lattes for 33 months. TA 6.4 g/l, dosage 5.5 g/l. 1,109 bottles made.

Pale apricot pink. Smells of clementine peel and Mexican orange blossom with a top note of dustiness. Earthy and terracotta-pot dusty on the palate, but also dried orange peel and goji berries and cloves. This actually tastes a bit like a Tavel rosé. Not much flesh on the mid palate, but it is elegant and intriguing. (TC) 11.3%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£36 producer's website

Candover Brook, Rosé Brut NV England

16

Full bottle 1,603 g. A project created by Mark and Julian Sainsbury of the Sainsbury's supermarket dynasty – vines planted on the family estate in Hampshire. Winemaker is Hervé Jestin. Made up of 85% from the 2018 vintage, and the remainder from a reserve wine kept in a solera system dating back to 2011. The blend is 54% Chardonnay, 33% Pinot Noir and 13% Pinot Meunier. Aged on lees for over 36 months in its secondary fermentation. Disgorged 17 August 2022.

I wonder where the solera wines come from originally, if, as the website says, the vines were planted in 2012. Good, saliva-drawing, crunchy stone fruit, like on-the-cusp-of-ripe nectarine and sour cherry. Bit of sharp red apple. Good beginning and middle, although it does a bit of a disappearing act on the end. Appetising. I could imagine this with a lusty gastro-pub burger. And I actually liked this more when it wasn't cold – 45 minutes out of the fridge it started to get this lovely cherry-lemon-sherbet tingle which gave it more length. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£38 RRP producer's website, Philglas & Swiggot, The Naked Grape, The Wine Yard

Gusbourne, Rosé Traditional Method 2019 England

16 -

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,654 g. 54% Chardonnay, 36% Pinot Noir, 10% Pinot Meunier. A small percentage of barrel-aged red wine. Sur lattes for 36 months. TA 9 g/l, dosage 10 g/l.

Deep coral pink. It really does smell of fresh, ripe raspberries and strawberries. The lemony acidity is bold and fans out quickly and right to the finish, but the fruit is firm and fresh with a dot of cinnamon spice that flickers in and out. Tiny bubbles, silky texture and a really clean-cut finish. Just a teeny bit short. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2026

£55 producer's website

Herbet Hall, Rosé Brut 2019 England

16

40% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 30% Meunier. Estate-grown Kent fruit.

Very pale. Almost golden rather than pink. Very pretty. Cherry blossom, apple blossom, toast and crackers, very slight hint of hazelnut but the fruit is crisp and very well-defined. Mouth-watering, dense finish. (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2027

£43.95 Lea & Sandeman

Langham, Rosé Brut NV England

17

Based on 2019, with 7% red wine. Dorset fruit. Spontaneous fermentation.

Golden, pale pink, fragrant, and just damn delicious. Spicy, red apples, rose hips. Beautiful, beautiful, rosy-cheeked, shiny apple fruit that just takes me to the heart of an orchard in autumn. This is superb. Fresh luminous-green tilleul grace notes dancing through the finish. Bravo Langham! (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2028

£34.95 Lea & Sandeman

Oxney, Classic Rosé Pinot Noir Brut 2019 England

17

Full bottle 1,651 g. Certified organic (Ecocert, Soil Association). 100% estate-grown Pinot Noir. Zero dosage.

If you're lucky enough to have a raspberry bush or two, you'll know what it's like to stand there in the late afternoon, pretending to pick raspberries when all you're really doing is eating them, greedily, one after another. You'll know that pop of

sweetness, tangled into the taste of long summer grass and the odd sharp shock of a raspberry that isn't quite ripe. Once you've tasted this wine, you'll know what picking raspberries tastes like. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£41 RRP

Wiston, Rosé Brut NV England

16

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. 40% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Meunier. 15% red wine. Full bottle 1,604 g. Disgorged 30 January 2024. Dosage 8 g/l.

Such a bright coral colour that it's almost orange! Quite a meaty nose and then raspberries, sour cherry and something a little medicinal (cough syrup?) on the palate. The bubbles are soft, and soften the acidity. Hibiscus and Earl Grey tea. Not terribly long but it has plenty to distract from that, and the finish is super-fresh, like chewing on fresh spearmint leaves. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£36 producer's website

Wiston, South Downs Rosé Brut 2018 England

17.5

Tasted blind in a line-up of 10 English sparkling wines. Full bottle 1,635 g. 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Pinot Meunier. All the fruit was fermented and aged nine months in old oak barrels. Disgorged 9 July 2023. Dosage 8 g/l.

Now *this* is what I like my rosés to look like! Vivid and verging on scarlet. Spicy and delicious. Lots of character here. Red cherries and rose hips, satsuma and clove. A touch of marzipan, although this is not a sweet-tasting wine. It's as dry as a bone. Nice pithy chew from middle to end. Fantastically spicy finish. A dramatic, head-tossing, gloriously baroque, cheekily burlesque wine which should absolutely not be drunk anywhere that formalities are strictly observed. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2038

£54 producer's website

White

Birchden Vineyards, The Gregarious Goose Bacchus 2023 England

16

Tasted blind with four other English Bacchus wines. Full bottle 1,302 g. TA 8.1 g/l, RA 2.6 g/l. Itasca, the company who makes the wines, reports: 'The 2023 season

started as very promising with a frost-free spring and excellent weather through the key flowering period in late June. The weather turned cooler and wetter as summer progressed, however a heat spike in mid September kicked on ripening leading to the biggest and one of the lowest acid harvests of the last 20 years. 18% fermented in neutral burgundy barrels with lees stirring and 82% fermented and aged on lees in tank prior to blending. Screwcap.

Slightly louder, sweeter, rounder nose than the Penn Croft Village Bacchus, which was tasted (blind) just before it. I wonder if there is a bit of oak in here? There is an immediate roundness on the palate as well, but it is the most fleeting impression before the acidity kicks in. This reminds me so much of the tiny, addictively sour, super-crunchy, bright-bright-bright green plums that are eaten with salt – I discovered them (at breakfast!) in Armenia. In English, they're called Persian green plums but they're also known as *salor*, *gojeh sabz*, *janerik*, *jarareng* and *erik*, depending on which part of the Middle East you are. (If you're curious, [check them out here](#).) It's the kind of food that makes your whole body pucker up in shock and then you go back for more. And more. The kind of wine I'd serve with a big bowl of spicy guacamole and salty corn chips. (TC) 12.2%

Drink 2024 – 2026

Chapel Down Chardonnay 2023 England

16

Full screwcapped bottle just 1,145 g.

Light, floral, unoaked Chardonnay aromas. Lively freshness and vibrant fruit. I'm enjoying this more than the two Chapel Down sparkling wines I tried chez Waitrose earlier today. There is real, ripe fruit in the middle! It's not the most artisanal product but is very creditable. 12%

Drink 2024 – 2025

£90 per case of 6 producer's website

Denbies Bacchus 2022 England

14.5

Tasted blind with four other English Bacchus wines. Full bottle 1,345 g. Cold fermented in stainless steel with a small portion barrel-fermented and aged. Screwcap.

Tingling (almost prickly) and quite broad, but nettly. Sorrel-sharp acidity. Painful acidity – raspy and seems to stab through the wine awkwardly, like a pin accidentally left in a seam. And then it falls off a cliff. Leaving a big hole. Not showcasing the best side of Bacchus, I'm afraid. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024

£16 RRP producer's website

House On The Hill Bacchus 2023 England

16

Tasted blind with four other English Bacchus wines. Full bottle 1,341 g. Screwcap. Very, very floral on the nose, especially when cold out the fridge – even rose petals! I'm not sure I've ever found roses in Bacchus before. Honeysuckle and tarragon, gooseberries and dandelion and dandelion leaf. Kiwi fruit. Like the Penn Croft Village Bacchus, it has silky soft but shiny bright acidity threading through the fruit. The balance here is just lovely. Just right. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2026

Knightor, Trevannion 2023 England

16.5

Full bottle 1,165 g. Made from the highly perfumed, pink-skinned Siegerrebe variety. The grapes were destemmed and gently pressed. The must was then fermented cool in stainless steel followed by a short time on fine lees before being bottled early 2024.

I'm tasting this while listening to a chaffinch just outside the open window, sitting on an old lichen-covered iron chair, singing his heart out. And the thing is, this wine seems to match that song. It's an exquisitely pretty little thing. Lilac and lychee, pears and crab-apple honey, white strawberries and the faintest breath of white pepper and cinnamon. It's off dry, but the sweetness is so very, very delicate that it seems to seal the perfection of this wine with a kiss. It is utterly delicious. I could drink it for breakfast! (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2025

£19.95 producer's website

Langham, Search For Enlightenment 2022 England

16.5 +

Full bottle just 1,170 g. 100% Chardonnay grown on Crawthorne Farm on cretaceous chalk and clay. Hand-picked on 13 October and fermented spontaneously. Full malo. Aged for 10 months in four old French oak barrels. Unfined and unfiltered and packaged in 1,143 reused glass bottles. Bravo!

Quite a deep straw colour. Really pretty impressively burgundian. Lots of complexity on the nose – very much more interesting than the Chapel Down version with quite a future. In fact, I suspect it will be even more impressive in a few months. **GV** 11%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£23.95 producer's website

Missing Gate Sauvignon Blanc 2023 England

15

Tank sample.

A bit dilute and nettly. It has a hole in the middle. Not nearly as good as previous years. Best with lime-drenched ceviche, I think. (TC)

Drink 2024

Missing Gate Chardonnay 2022 England

15.5 +

A bit of an ice-queen Chardonnay. An elegant, aloof wine that feels as if it's white linen ironed to a blade. A whisper of oak-spice trapped in steel. It's a lemon-etched, stone-edged, coiled-up, taut slip of a wine. Lime, salt and spice. Mouth-watering. I actually think this could do with another year in bottle. (TC)

Drink 2025 – 2030

Oastbrook Pinot Blanc 2023 England

16

Full bottle 1,257 g. 100% Alsatian clone Pinot Blanc, estate grown. Kent. Hand-picked in early October. Low-temperature fermentation and the wine was left in tank over winter but not allowed to go to malolactic fermentation. The juice was very clear and required minimal fining. Bottled in late March 2024. TA 7.7 g/l, pH 3.0, RS 7.5 g/l. 2,600 bottles produced. Screwcap.

A really pretty nose of pear blossom and lime zest. Delicate but zesty. Matice melon and green apple and a shock of electric lime acidity which has been beautifully balanced by the just-right residual sugar. A whippersnapper of a Pinot Blanc with both charm and attitude. (TC) 11%

Drink 2024 – 2026

£21.50 producer's website

Oastbrook Pinot Gris 2023 England

15.5

Full bottle 1,269 g. 100% Pinot Gris, Alsace clone. Picked early October. After low-temperature fermentation the wine was left in tank over winter but not allowed to go through malolactic fermentation. Bottled in March 2024. TA 7 g/l, pH 3.05, RS 4.8 g/l. 2,250 bottles produced. Screwcap.

Powdery, floral aromas of iris and wisteria. The acidity is intense and even a little

bit grippy, dominating the stone fruit on the palate, but giving the wine linearity. Not quite as exciting as their Pinot Blanc or blanc de noir wines. (TC) 12%
Drink 2024 – 2026
£22.50 producer's website

Oastbrook, Block 1 Pinot Gris 2023 England

17

Full bottle 1,271 g. 100% Pinot Gris (Alsace clone) from a unique block of vines in their Kent vineyard. Picked early October. After low-temperature fermentation the wine was left in tank over winter but not allowed to go through malolactic fermentation. Bottled April 2024. TA 6.5 g/l, pH 3.12, RS 4.7 g/l. 1,200 bottles produced. Screwcap.

Noticeably richer on the nose than their other Pinot Gris. Still masses of acidity, but more fruit, more intensity of flavour. Apricot, pickled lemons, key lime. There's also an interesting wet-stone flintiness bringing another dimension and then the finish floods with clementine. This is really good, especially if you're an acid freak. Riesling fans will love it. (TC) 12%
Drink 2025 – 2030
£25 producer's website

Oastbrook Pinot Meunier 2023 England

17

100% Pinot Meunier from Oastbrook's Kent vineyard. Hand-picked in early October. Low-temperature fermentation, in tank over winter, no malo, minimal fining. Bottled in March 2024. TA 8.2 g/l, pH 3.0, RS 3.9 g/l. 1,300 bottles produced. Screwcap.

Yip, it's white Meunier. Blanc de noir. And it tastes of blood orange and tangerine and sour cherry and a dusting of nutmeg on the end. Bright, exuberant, zigzagging with energy and bold acidity. Great texture – like very fine fired clay. This would be amazing with pink-grapefruit ceviche or sushi. And I'm pretty confident it will stay Peter-Pan young for ages. (TC) 12%
Drink 2024 – 2030
£23.50 producer's website

Oastbrook, White Pinot Noir 2023 England

16.5

Full bottle 1,266 g. 100% Pinot Noir from their own vineyard. Hand-picked in early October. Low-temperature fermentation, no malo, bottled in March 2024. TA 7.6 g/l, pH 2.92, RS 6.4 g/l. 3,700 bottles produced. Screwcap.

Floral nose, like a froth of orange blossom. Juicy. Nectarines and a rather yummy dash of salinity. Fine-boned and elegant with a kind of 'transparency' on the finish. The acidity is piercing, but poised. Surprisingly, the wine was actually better when tasted the following day at room temperature. The fruit tasted riper, rounder and more defined. No hurry to drink this, and don't serve it too cold. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2029

£22.50 producer's website

Oxney Chardonnay 2022 England

16

Full bottle 1,218 g. Certified organic (Ecocert, Soil Association). Estate-grown grapes from the longest-certified organic estate in the UK. Spontaneous fermentation in oak.

Wet stones and walnut brittle on the nose. The acidity is so scrunched up and tense that it's either going to take off and blast through the atmosphere or it's going to crack the glass. Despite the spine-crunching structure and bitter-lemon drive, there is a softer toffee-apple combination of shock-sharp green Granny Smith apple and fudgy-warm caramelisation that appears as it opens in the glass.

Don't serve too cold. (TC) 11%

Drink 2024 – 2027

Penn Croft, Village Bacchus 2023 England

16.5

Tasted blind with four other English Bacchus wines. Full bottle 1,308 g. Hampshire fruit. 100% tank-fermented. Screwcap.

Delicate elderflower nose, alluding to Cape gooseberry as well. Very pretty. Slight and slender. Delicately floral and there is a spicy wild-grassiness which reminds me of our hay meadow right now, in early summer, just as the long, green grasses are flowering. The acidity runs through it all like a silvery silk ribbon. Really good!

The prettiest Bacchus in this little blind line-up. (TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2026

Penn Croft, Single Vineyard Bacchus 2022 England

17

Tasted blind with four other English Bacchus wines. Full bottle 1,334 g. From estate vineyards, regeneratively farmed. 100% fermented and aged in 228-litre barrels for 10 months with no MLF. Low-intervention, small-batch winemaking. Screwcap.

Passion fruit and gooseberry on the nose, lilac top notes; fragrant, ripe, but tightly restrained. And 'ripe but tightly restrained' is the signature of this wine. The fruit is stunningly ripe and almost urgently pure, but it's contained. Crisply contained,

like a cut-glass accent, like chandelier crystals splitting puddles of warm sunlight into refracted prisms of long, linear clarity. Cool stone spine, passion-fruit-soaked angelica, lime zest and this wonderful ground-up dried-lilac-blossom-and-quarry-stone-dust magic that walks a liquid line between minerality and florality (my editor tells me there is no such word, so in this instance I use it with poetic licence). I have tasted this wine four times (I think) over the past two years, and every time there is something more. Every time it gains in structure, verticality, depth. This shows what Bacchus can do, grown in the right way, in the right place, and made by someone who cares and takes time. I would love to taste this blind with some of the top Pouilly-Fumé and Sancerre growers' wines. Don't be afraid to age this wine. (TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

£42 producer's website

Penn Croft Pinot Blanc 2021 England

17

Full bottle 1,296 g. Pinot Blanc from clay-based vineyards. Fermented in neutral burgundy barrels, malo, periodic lees stirring.

I tasted this about eight months ago and what a change in just eight months. The 'bare bones of Pinot Blanc' have taken on flesh. (Isn't wine so miraculous, the way it does this?!) I'm kind of awed by how delicious and ripe and white-peach-dripping-down-my-chin this wine is. Is this really English wine? White peach and tarragon; the scent when you take a Thai basil leaf between your fingers and very gently bruise it; oak-whispers of soft pine; clementines and lime zest. It's a wine that tastes like a first kiss: tentative, sweet, stinging with electric awareness, salty, awkwardly angled and amazing. If this is the future of Pinot Blanc, it's where my money would go. (TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2030

£32 producer's website

Simpsons, Gravel Castle Chardonnay 2023 England

15.5

Full bottle 1,162 g. Screwcap. Burgundian Chardonnay clones harvested from various parcels from the Simpsons' estate vineyards in Kent. The grapes were then gently pressed, and the juice was cold settled for 24 hours. Once racked, the juice was inoculated with aromatic yeasts. Mid alcoholic fermentation the wine underwent partial malolactic conversion. Aged on fine yeast lees and stirred twice a week to add texture prior to bottling in spring 2024.

Greengage and lemon barley, high acidity with the hard shiny, bright-green curve

of a highly polished Granny Smith apple. Acuate and focused to a rapier point although there is a hint of peach. A bit too racy to drink on its own, but it would be good with ceviche, I think. It is definitely good with aged English cheddar.

(TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2026

£19.50 RRP producer's website, The Wine Society, Corkk

Westwell Chardonnay 2022 England

15.5

Full bottle 1,221 g. Kent fruit. Partial spontaneous fermentation and aged in French oak barrels.

Give it lots and lots of air and do not serve cold. This wine is so bony and stony and skinny and sparse that any mention of a fridge and it turns into a puff of dry ice. Nettles and lemons. Really, really needs food and is good with food. (TC) 11%

Drink 2024 – 2030

Rosé

Gusbourne, English Rosé 2023 England

15.5

Full bottle 1,386 g.

Fancy cut-glass bottle. Plenty of tart, brisk fruit – oranges and redcurrants, as cut-glass as the bottle. Dry and quenching. (TC) 12.5%

Drink 2024 – 2025

£25 producer's website

The Heretics, Pale Rosé 2023 England

17

Full bottle 1,283 g. Pinot Noir from Missing Gate Vineyard in the Crouch Valley, Essex. Picked 14 October 2023. Fermented 100% in old burgundy barrels. TA 6.75 g/l, RS 1.24 g/l.

I love the label of this new venture from Gareth Maxwell (ex Ellis Wines, Hattingley Valley and WineGB) and Jimmy Hunter. Featuring a beautiful photo by young Louix Hunter, it's a part of a fantastic project the founders are running to foster young creative talent – [worth reading up on](#) (and looking at some of Louix Hunter's other beautiful photos!). Very pale, as the name suggests, but packed with spicy guava and alpine strawberry fruit. Delicious ginger-nut undertow, and then blood-orange peel. This is so, so good. It tastes as if the residual sugar is higher (than practically bone dry) but it must just be because that

fruit is so succulent. And the oak has been beautifully judged, giving the wine silken roundness and peppery depth. Bravo! I'd drink this over an expensive Provence rosé any day. (TC) 11.5%

Drink 2024 – 2027

£19.95 producer's website

Oastbrook, Rosé Reserve 2022 England

15

Full bottle 1,255 g. 100% Pinot Noir from estate vineyards. Hand-picked in October. A blend of pressed whole-bunch and saignée juice. Low-temperature fermentation, no malo, bottled in late March 2023. TA 7.1 g/l, pH 3.1, RS 4 g/l. 1,200 bottles produced. Screwcap.

Smells like strawberries and sour cream. Sweet and sour, rhubarb and rose hip.

The acidity feels a little bit aggressive, especially when the wine is very cold, but at the same time the wine tastes tired, as if it might be slightly oxidised. Not as exciting as their white wines. (TC) 12%

Drink 2023

£22.50 producer's website

Westwell Pinot Meunier 2022 England

16.5

Full bottle 1,219 g. Grapes grown in Kent. Picked 12 October at 18.7 Brix and 10.5 TA. Spontaneous fermentation in stainless-steel tanks. It took a full 12 months to ferment (not interfered with at all!). Full malo. Unfined, unfiltered.

They say, 'Colour: copper rose'. I like that, except it's much, much paler than that description makes it out to be. 'Pearl-white copper rose' is my counter. Blanc de noir rather than rosé. It smells like pears and pink grapefruit and like pickled galangal. It's pronking on slender, long-legged, nervously high acidity. The acidity is so searingly high that it's a bit of spine shock, but it was unexpectedly, exceptionally good with kimchi scrambled eggs and also with Mat Lindsay's anchovies on toast. This may well stay young and fresh and vibrant for far longer than the drinking window I've suggested. (TC) 11%

Drink 2024 – 2027

Red

Denbies Pinot Noir 2022 England

16

Full bottle 1,291 g.

Pale red and a cool-climate Pinot nose. A slender slip of a wine with see-through cherry and strawberry fruit that makes me think of old-fashioned Christmas baubles. Fragile tannins and a thrill of white pepper that runs the length of the wine. Real fruit. A good English Pinot. (TC) 12%

Drink 2024 – 2026

£24.50 RRP producer's website

Gusbourne Pinot Noir 2022 England

16

Full bottle 1,422 g. Fermented in stainless steel, aged in oak barrels.

The decidedly present presence of oak is miraculously not suppressing the wild-red-berry fruit, which is skinny and tart but somehow ripe. Popping with juice and full of character. Dark chocolate and coffee bean in the mid palate and attractively leafy and peppery towards the end. I would love this with venison pie – like a cranberry jus. (TC) 13%

Drink 2024 – 2028

£40 producer's website

Missing Gate, Three Horse Land Pinot Noir 2022 England

17

Not yet released. From a parcel higher up in the vineyard than the Two Horse Pinot – less top soil and it would have taken more horses to plough it back in the day, so locals informally referred to agricultural land like this as 'three horse'.

A pure, robin song of red fruit, pulsing with life, tasting of cherries and iodine and ferny streams. It's bright and cocky and full of energy. The tannins are just the right side of 'fine silk over rough lace'. They thread through the fruit rather than framing it, which is a good thing because the wine is slender and delicate and would be dominated by framework. It's gorgeous. And it may well have a longer life than I've indicated. (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2028

Missing Gate, Two Horse Land Pinot Noir 2022 England

17

Not yet released. From a parcel lower down and with a bit more top soil than the Three Horse Pinot.

Interesting to see how different this is from the Three Horse Pinot. Much darker fruit; denser, smoky, with a cooked-fruit richness. Blackberries and rust. A touch

of bacon and sweet pork fat. The tannins are broader, but supple – chestnut skins and gentle friction. A very impressive Pinot. (TC)

Drink 2024 – 2030

Wiston, The Twenty Six Pinot Noir 2022 England

16

Full bottle 1,287 g. Organically farmed but not certified. The fruit comes from the first 26 rows of their Findon vineyard, because these rows ripen better than the rest of the vineyard. Picked 13 October. Destemmed, foot-crushed, soaked for 24 hours before being inoculated with three different yeast strains. Fermentation then took place over two weeks, with gentle cap management twice daily. Free-run juice went to barrel, press juice to tanks. Aged for 15 months.

Super-light and snappy, it has fruit that starts as sweet as summer pudding and finishes bracingly tart. But the balance is just right, with the tannins as nimble and featherlight as the fruit. A little dryad of a wine. (TC) 11%

Drink 2024 – 2025

£29 producer's website

The main photo, reproduced here with kind permission of Missing Gate Vineyard, is of Jack Speakman (son of Nick Speakman) with his dog Pluto.