

Tested



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Charlotte Reather takes one for the team when she tests English sparkling wine

With the easing of lockdown, we can begin to see family and friends again so why not mark these special moments with a bottle of English sparkling wine, while, at the same time, helping sustain our homegrown vineyards?

Many English wineries producing sparkling wines are situated on the same seam of chalk, which runs under the English Channel all the way to the region of Champagne in France.

Enjoying a similar terroir, the English vineyards benefit from a long and cooler ripening period (maintaining flavour, aroma and acidity), helping to create multi-award winning wines that are giving powerful French rivals a run for their

money. And, with a burgeoning array of English fizz from which to choose – often accompanied by a smaller price tag – what’s not to love?

I put 12 bottles of bubbles to the test with husband, Ed, photographer, Chris Jelf, and four friends. By the time the tasting is over we’ve forgotten to take a close-up of the Balfour blanc de blanc, Chris is found taking a ‘recuperative nap’ on the sofa, the children have gone feral and everyone is exceedingly ‘over-refreshed’!

And then, the next morning, the neighbours enjoy a vision of me shuffling along the ‘walk of shame’ to the recycling bin...pushing a wheelbarrow with the evidence piled high!

#takingoneforthecountrysideteam



Wiston Estate Rosé 2014
Grapes: 68% Pinot Noir, 22% Pinot Meunier, 10% Chardonnay

With apple notes at the beginning giving way to raspberries and perfectly-sized bubbles, not too large, not too fine, my team of tasters unanimously voted for the Wiston rosé ‘Charlie’s Choice’ by polishing off the entire contents within a matter of minutes! The Goring family has owned the 6,000-acre Wiston Estate since 1743, but only planted vines in 2006. A winery to watch, the vineyard was crowned ‘Winery of the Year’ in the Wine GB Awards, 2018.

£38.50
● wistonestate.com



Nyetimber Blanc de Blancs 2013
Grapes: Chardonnay

One of the leading lights of English sparkling wine, Nyetimber’s West Sussex vines date back to 1988. The 2013 vintage is the first blanc de blanc using only fruit from their 2009 Hampshire vineyard. The 1992 vintage of this wine was the first wine to be made at Nyetimber and, arguably, the wine that started the English sparkling wine industry as it stands today. Made by Cherie Spriggs (head winemaker) and Brad Greatrix (winemaker) Nyetimber is a brand that never fails to impress.

£45.99
● nyetimber.com



Poulton Hill Estate Bulari 2016
Grapes: 65% Seyval Blanc, 35% Pinot Noir

Founded in 2010, Poulton Hill is a small family-run vineyard near Cirencester in the Cotswolds producing limited batches of wine, expertly blended at nearby Three Choirs winery. Silver medalist at the Glass of Bubbly Awards 2019 (Zesty & Zingy Category) and Bronze medalist at the WineGB Awards 2019, Poulton Hill is flying the flag for West Country producers.

£28.99
● poultonhillestate.co.uk



Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé Brut 2017
Grapes: 100% Pinot Noir

When ex-RAF pilot Bob Lindo and his wife, Annie, planted their first 8,000 vines in 1989, they never dreamed of the phenomenal success they would achieve within two decades, earning HRH Prince of Wales’ Royal Warrant in 2018. Previous vintages have won the World Champion sparkling rosé trophy at the Bollecini del Mondo Italy, Gold for at the Decanter World Wine Awards and Gold at the WineGB Awards. There’s only one word for this delicious pinot noir rosé: sensational.

£29.95
● camelvalley.com



Ambriel Rosé 2014
Grapes: 100% Pinot Noir

The Ambriel is another enjoyable sparkling rosé with wild strawberry notes. Banker-turned-viticulturalist Charles Outhwaite and his wife, Wendy, a former barrister, ditched the day jobs to tend vines on the edge the South Downs a decade ago. Since then they have garnered a slew of awards, including silver at the Champagne and Sparkling Wine World Championships 2019 and silver at International Wine Challenge 2019.

£28.95 (£26.50 in a case of 6)
● ambrielsparkling.com



Jenkyn Place Blanc de Blanc 2015
Grapes: 100% Chardonnay (estate grown)

Turns out Chris did the wedding photos for the family who own Jenkyn Place, so he already knows it’s delicious. Nestled in the North Hampshire Downs near the village of Bentley, the Jenkyn vineyards cover 12 acres of what were once hop fields. Winemaker Dermot Sugrue, who also works with Wiston, is responsible for creating the magic of a truly refreshing blanc de blanc with well-balanced notes of green apple and citrus. Recent awards include a silver medal at the prestigious Sommelier Wine Awards 2020.

£38
● jenkynplace.com



Stanlake Non Vintage Brut
Grapes: Pinot Noir (80%),
Meunier (15%), Chardonnay (5%)

Located just outside of Reading, Stanlake Park is the largest vineyard in the county of Berkshire, with 10,000 vines over 15 acres. Currently managed by husband and wife team Nico Centonze and Natalia Pezzone, head winemaker Nico is lending his talents to create Stanlake's still and sparkling wines using the 'Methode Traditionelle' for the Brut, which has pear and apple notes. Bronze winner of the T&CVA Wine Challenge (2019).

£24.99

● stanlakepark.com



Bolney Blanc de Blancs 2016
Grapes: 100% Chardonnay

Run by three generations of the same family in West Sussex, the Bolney Wine Estate was founded by Janet and Rodney Pratt in 1972 and is now headed up by daughter and head winemaker, Sam Linter, who creates red and white still wines as well as sparkling. The blanc de blanc is fresh and dry and took gold at Teksom 2020 and Silver at the International Wine Challenge (Tranche 1) 2020.

Price: £30.99 (free delivery on order over £15)

● bolneywineestate.com



Simpsons Chalklands Classic Cuvée 2017
Grapes: 60% Pinot Noir, 40% Chardonnay

A sparkling wine from the Garden of England, the Simpson vineyard is situated in the Elham Valley, an unspoiled part of the North Downs of Kent. Although roots were laid down only six years ago in 2014, owners Charles and Ruth Simpson have been making award-winning wines at Domaine Sainte Rose, their stunning, southern French property, for the past 17 years. I predict Simpsons will grow into a viticultural front-runner of the future.

£28

● simpsonswine.com



Digby Leander Pink Non Vintage Brut

Grapes: Pinot Noir; Chardonnay; Pinot Meunier
Launched in 2013, Digby Fine English is England's first blending house. Trevor Clough and Jason Humphrey's business model was inspired after a trip to Napa Valley in California when they decided to take grapes grown in small local vineyards across the south east and turn them into a modern brand of English sparkling wine. Digby now graces the shelves of Harvey Nichols and Fortnum and Mason. The floral summer-berry noted fizz gets a big thumbs-up from all of us.

£33

● digby-fine-english.com



Balfour Skye Blanc de Blanc 2014
Grapes: Chardonnay

Balfour has a clean fresh taste with lots of apple notes and key lime acidity. It's a winner, with my clutch of quaffers all voting it a strong eight! And, although we are amateurs, we are not wide of the mark because the Balfour blanc de blanc is only created in the finest vintage years and made exclusively from Chardonnay grapes grown in the Old Eight Acre vineyard at the Hush Heath Estate in Kent. IWC Gold Medalist, earning 95 points out of 100.

£45

● hushheath.com



Furnace Projects Wren 2013
Grapes: Phoenix and Seyval

Set in the Herefordshire hamlet of Yarkhill, the larger of the two Furnace Projects vineyards lies within the valley of the river Frome, making the soil and aspect ideal for growing grapes. Working closely with Three Choirs vineyard, who press and bottle the wine, don't expect a traditional Champagne taste, as maker Beth Derbyshire has eschewed traditional grapes, such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in favour of Phoenix and Seyval, resulting in fizz with riper red apple notes and a yeasty floral finish.

£24.50

● furnaceprojects.com