

English still wines

Although currently best known for its sparkling wines, there’s huge potential for the production of still wines in the UK, says Susie Barrie MW – as these bottle show



IF THE EXTRAORDINARY weather of 2018 in the British Isles proved anything, it is to expect the unexpected. That said, according to Dr Alistair Nesbitt of Climate Wine Consulting, the average growing season temperature in the UK is steadily rising. If this trend continues, it isn’t just sparkling wine that the country’s winemakers should be focusing on. Still wines can and should form a credible part of future planning. Although the UK’s reputation as a producer of world-class wines has understandably been founded on fizz, still wines are now deservedly beginning to share

the limelight. As Charlie Holland of Gusbourne wine estate in Kent states: ‘The success of English wine has rightly been built on sparkling wine, as this is the style most suited to our climate.’ But when things begin to hot up as they did in 2018, the potential to produce accomplished table wines becomes a serious reality. It’s not all about the climate though. Young and ambitious wine producers, working with the right vine clones and varieties, in the right sites, and using the latest winemaking techniques, are already making top-quality still wines.

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The most successful still wines to date have been made from Chardonnay, Bacchus, Pinot Gris and, to a lesser extent, Ortega for the whites; and Pinot Noir and the earlier-ripening Pinot Noir Précoce for the reds. There are also some fun rosés being made from blends that include the likes of Regent and Phoenix. At its best, UK Chardonnay is reminiscent of good Chablis, with crisp, green apple acidity and intense but elegant flavours. That said a handful of producers are pushing the boundaries with richer, oak-influenced wines that show tremendous potential. Bacchus is an English speciality that offers the florality of Riesling with the zesty crunch of Sauvignon Blanc, and it comes in a variety of styles from light and refreshing to more richly

textured. UK Pinot Gris is a softer style, with orchard fruit and spice flavours, while Pinot Noir tends to be lighter than its Burgundian counterpart but with all the earthy, plum and summer fruit flavours you’d expect. Clones are another, rather complex issue, but put simply, the clones most suited to still wine production aren’t necessarily the same as those for top-quality sparkling wines. Where producers are confident enough to plant with still wine production as the priority, though, wines of real quality and style are more than achievable, especially in riper vintages such as 2014 and 2016. It’s almost impossible at this early stage to pinpoint regional differences or to select one area over another. Essex, however, is a county to watch. Liam Idzikowski, winemaker at Lyme Bay in Dorset, sources a significant amount of fruit from here. ‘This is the driest area in the UK, with large expanses of land suitable for growing because of the low altitude,’ he explains.

This is a selection of UK still wines tasted mainly at the 2018 WineGB tasting and the 2018 WineGB Awards

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Chapel Down, Kit’s Coty Chardonnay, Kent 2015 93
£30 Chapel Down
This is one of the finest Chardonnays from the Kit’s Coty vineyard to date. Full of roasted hazelnut and ripe apricot flavours, it’s also incredibly mouthwatering and refined. Compelling. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12.5%



Gusbourne, Guinevere Chardonnay, Kent 2014 93
£25 Berry Bros & Rudd, Exel, Fortnum & Mason, Harvey Nichols, Le Vignoble
Another example of what still Chardonnay can achieve in the UK. Fermented in barrique, six months in French oak: toasty and savoury, perfectly balanced. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12%



Litmus Wines, Element 20, Surrey 2013 92
£16.99-£22.50 Harvey Nichols, Waitrose
John Worontschak’s Litmus makes complex, cool-climate wines from fruit sourced across the south of England. This 50:50 blend of Bacchus and Chardonnay is the stand-out: rich yet savoury and long. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12%



Off The Line, Hip Rosé, East Sussex 2017 92
£20 English Wine Centre, Gerry’s Wines & Spirits, Off the Line Vineyard
Newcomer Off the Line focuses on premium rosés. This is its top wine and one of the best UK rosés I’ve tasted. Like a fine Provence rosé, it is beautifully stylish. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 11%



Lyme Bay, Pinot Noir Rosé, Devon 2017 90
£15.99-£16.50 Christopher Piper, Ellis of Richmond, Enotria&Coe, Great Western Wine, Jascots
The fruit for this ripe rosé is sourced in Essex, one of the driest parts of the UK. A 100% Pinot Noir, it has summer fruit aromas and attractive, juicy acidity. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 12%



Sutton Ridge Vineyard, Rosé, Somerset 2017 90
£12.99 Brockley Stores, Lye Cross Farm, The Wine Shop Winscombe
Luke Ford planted this vineyard on his family’s Somerset farm in 2011. His stylish rosé is made from Regent, Phoenix and Pinot Noir. Fruity and harmonious. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 11.5%



Chapel Down, Kit’s Coty Bacchus, Kent 2016 91
£28.99 Selfridges
This first vintage of Bacchus from Kit’s Coty. Highly individual, with punchy greengage, lemon zest and herbal aromas. Spicy, creamy and tropical, with a pithy, bitter orange finish. Fascinating. **Drink** 2018-2021 **Alc** 13%



Nutbourne, Bacchus, West Sussex 2016 91
£13.50 English Wine Centre, Seven Cellars, Top Selection
A classic, well-made English Bacchus. Floral, flinty aromas lead the way, backed up by fresh herbal flavours, crisp acidity and a succulent, rounded finish. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 12%



Lyme Bay, Bacchus Block, Devon 2017 90
£16.99 Christopher Piper, Davy’s, Hennings
Winemaker Liam Idzikowski sources this fruit from the Crouch Valley in Essex. Rich and smoky with punchy grapefruit flavours, this is a ripe and concentrated Bacchus, with a hint of botrytis. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 11.5%



Dunleavy, Pinot Noir Rosé, Somerset 2017 88
£12.95-£16.50 Dunleavy Vineyards, Le Vignoble, Vinoteca
Ingrid Bates established her Somerset project a decade ago. Her rosé is is refreshingly dry and summery, with attractive wild strawberry and red cherry fruit. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 11.5%



Woodchester Valley, Pinot Rosé, Cotswolds 2017 88
£12.50 Woodchester Valley Vineyard
Pinot Noir with a splash of Pinot Gris. This intensely coloured rosé is full and fruity with bold red cherry aromas and flavours. A hint of black pepper and appealing nip of black fruit tannin on the finish. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 11.5%



Gusbourne, Pinot Noir, Kent 2016 92
£29.75 Lea & Sandeman
As close as English Pinot gets to rivalling the best. Aromas of earthy plum fruit, smoky oak. The palate is light but juicy and full of classic Pinot flavours that will develop well over the next couple of years. **Drink** 2019-2023 **Alc** 12%



Westwell Wines, Ortega Amphora, Kent 2016 88
£14.95 Westwell Wines Estate
The first UK wine to be made in a terracotta amphora; the increased lees contact adds texture and breadth. Initially restrained, it has lovely Chablis-esque freshness and minerality, but with more fruit. **Drink** 2018-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Woodchester Valley, Culver Hill, Cotswolds 2017 87
£10.99 Cotswold Park Farm Shop, Woodchester Valley Vineyard
A refreshing blend of Seyval, Ortega, Bacchus and Pinot Gris made in a spicy, aromatic style that’s ideally suited to lightly spiced Asian dishes. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 11.4%



Sharpham Vineyard, Barrel Fermented Madeleine Angevine, Devon 2014 86
£17.95 Le Vignoble, Sharpham Wine & Cheese
A highly individual take on the Madeleine Angevine grape. The oak is quite dominant but there are also aromatic, floral notes and a fresh zip of acidity. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 12%



Chapel Down, Pinot Noir, Kent 2014 88
£15.99 Chapel Down
With a pale brick colour and warming sour cherry and leather aromas, this is fully mature English Pinot in a light-bodied, sappy and earthy style. Delicious now, especially with a roast leg of lamb. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 12%



Bearley Vineyard, Bard’s Red Pinot Noir Précoce, Warwickshire 2017 85
£13.99 Vinology
Bearley’s 2ha vineyard was planted in 2005. This blend of Pinot Noir Précoce and Regent is a fun and easy-drinking red with bright blackberry fruit. **Drink** 2018-2019 **Alc** 12%



Denbies, Noble Harvest, Surrey 2016 92
£19.99/37.5cl Waitrose
A sweet, botrytised Ortega. Orange rind aromas and flavours are underpinned by a perfect balance of zesty acidity and apricot sweetness. A versatile match for creamy or fruity desserts. **Drink** 2018-2022 **Alc** 12%