

English Bacchus 2018

There's suddenly a lot of buzz around Bacchus as a potential 'signature grape' for UK-produced still wines. Susie Barrie MW picks her selection of the best bottles to try



For many of us, the first image conjured up by the word 'Bacchus' is of a Roman god, perhaps with a crown of vine leaves, an entrancing and ambivalent figure full of mystery and fascination. Bacchus the grape variety doesn't enjoy quite the same fame – or infamy – as its classical namesake, though it is arguably no less intriguing. Created in Germany in 1933, Bacchus is a crossing of Müller-Thurgau with a Silvaner x Riesling cross. It ripens early, so has the advantage of being suitable for sites considered too cool for Riesling. It can

be arrestingly aromatic and characterful, with a zesty exuberance and a core of mouthwatering freshness.

Bacchus was brought to the UK in 1973 and has since become the fourth most-planted grape variety, covering 200ha. Given that Bacchus is rarely found outside these two countries, there is clearly an opportunity for it to become a significant calling card for the UK as the country builds its reputation as a producer of not just sparkling wines but of still wines too.

But do we know the real Bacchus? Opinions vary as to what constitutes a typical (or even desirable) wine from



Chapel Down, Sparkling Bacchus, Kent 2018 89

£17.99 Chapel Down, Waitrose

England's answer to Prosecco: unashamedly easy-drinking, this carbonated sparkler is off-dry and floral, underpinned by Bacchus' crunch and zestiness. A refreshing fizz, ideal for a summer picnic. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12%**



Camel Valley, Bacchus Dry, Essex/Cornwall 2018 92

£13.95-£14.99 Averys, Camel Valley, Nickolls & Perks, Ocado, The Wine Society, Waitrose (regional), Waitrose Cellar

Energetic and engaging, tangy, full, lemony and long. A lovely example of what Bacchus can achieve. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 12.8%**



Chapel Down, Bacchus, Kent 2018 92

£13.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Chapel Down, Waitrose, Waitrose Cellar

A great example: herbal, grassy aromas and really fresh, zesty flavours. In the floral Sauvignon Blanc mould – mouthwatering summer drinking. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12%**



Hush Heath Estate, Balfour Liberty's Bacchus, Kent 2018 92

£19 Carruthers & Kent, Hush Heath Estate

There's a touch of oak in this wild-fermented Bacchus that gives it a smoky note and a creamy texture. Packed with ripe mango and passion fruit flavours, it is juicy and bold with a long spicy finish. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 11%**



Bolney Estate, Foxhole Vineyard Bacchus, Sussex 2018 91

£17.99-£20.50 Naked Wines, Noble Green, TJ Wines

Blended with 5% Reichensteiner and 50% oak-fermented. Displays a savoury, mineral character along with rich, rounded, vegetal notes. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 12.5%**



Hoffmann & Rathbone, HR, Sussex 2018 91

£19 Hoffmann & Rathbone

Subtle aromas of white flowers and herbs in this elegant, barrel-fermented wine give way to a juicy, fresh and rounded style of Bacchus (with 20% Reichensteiner) that is stylish and self-assured. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 11.5%**



Winbirri, Bacchus, Norfolk 2018 91

£15.99-£17.99 Bakers & Larners, Lea & Sandeman, Waitrose, Waitrose Cellar, Winbirri

The 2015 vintage won Platinum at the DWVA in 2017. The 2018 vintage is another classic example that is beautifully balanced, with plenty of grapefruit, gooseberry and tropical fruit. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12.5%**



Lily Farm, Bacchus, Devon 2018 90

£12.95 Lily Farm Vineyard

Light blossomy aromas with flinty overtones. On the palate this is fresh, clean and mouthwatering, with flavours of asparagus and pea shoot. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 11.5%**



Sutton Ridge, Bacchus, Somerset 2018 90

£12.99 Brockley Stores, Novel Wines, The Wine Shop Winscombe

Bright, fresh and grassy style. The palate is juicy and rounded but also zesty and tangy. An attractive and easy-drinking style. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 11%**

this variety. Touted by some as the UK's answer to Sauvignon Blanc, others find its florality more akin to that of its parent, Riesling. Others still feel that we have yet to discover the true potential of Bacchus and that it is too early to say just what range of styles it is capable of.

New frontier

Josh Donaghay-Spire, head winemaker at Chapel Down in Kent, has made seven different Bacchus wines to date. The most ambitious is Kit's Coty Bacchus, which is wild-fermented and aged in used French oak over nine months. Donaghay-Spire embodies the spirit of young UK winemakers when he says of working with Bacchus: 'We're just getting started: styles are evolving and changing, and it's our responsibility to explore. I believe Bacchus can be a world-class wine.'

Over at Flint Vineyard in Norfolk, owner and winemaker Ben Wittchell has undertaken an extensive

research project aimed at analysing the aromatics and constituent parts of Bacchus. One of the key findings to date is just how complex Bacchus is when compared to other varieties.

Whatever you may think of Bacchus, it certainly performed well in the long, warm summer of 2018, which was ideal for making still wines. Most of those I've tasted are terrific: perfectly ripe with bags of flavour and character. The range of styles is growing too – from light, floral and zesty, to tangy gooseberry and cut-grass styles, to richly tropical versions.

Within my recommendations I've included a wide range of styles, all current releases from the 2018 vintage. Some wines, such as the Kit's Coty mentioned above, are still maturing and yet to be released. But, wherever you start, keep an eye out for 2018 Bacchus and start painting your own picture of this intriguing grape variety. **D**

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Laneberg Wine, The Winery Bacchus, Leicestershire 2018 89

£16 Laneberg Wine, Richard Granger

A touch of residual sugar lends a gentle honeyed note to the elderflower and white peach flavours in this elegant and well-made wine. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12%**



Woodchester Valley, Orpheus Bacchus, Cotswolds 2018 89

£15-£17.55 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Le Vignoble, Woodchester Valley Vineyard

A fresh and elegant style, showing gentle floral aromas. Tangy in the mouth with zesty lemon fruit and a fine herbal note to the finish. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12%**



Aldwick Estate, Bacchus, Somerset 2018 87

£13-£14.99 Aldwick Estate, Davis Bell McCraith, Novel Wines

Aromatic and grapey, notes of lemon zest and elderflower. Not complex but made in an attractively light, bone-dry and easy-drinking style. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 11.5%**



Flint Vineyard, Bacchus, Norfolk 2018 87

£16.49 Berry Bros & Rudd, CH Wine Merchants, Flint Vineyard, Harper Wells

Perhaps a little challenging to taste, this stays just the right side of sweaty but it is certainly pungent, crisp and dry with brisk lemon and herbal flavours. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 12%**



Giffords Hall, Bacchus, Suffolk 2018 85

£14.50-£17.95 Giffords Hall, Jeroboams

Water-white in colour, there is a touch of sugar in this fresh and youthful style of Bacchus that suits it well. Floral and smoky on the nose, it's also pithy, tangy and refreshing. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 13%**



Roberson, London Cru Baker Street Bacchus, London 2018 85

£15 Roberson Wine

Made at one of London's up-and-coming urban wineries, with fruit from Kent and West Sussex. Dry, rounded and tropical style, but it lacks some of the zest and vibrancy of a really great example. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12%**



Bow in the Cloud Vineyard, Bacchus, Wiltshire 2018 83

£11 Bow in the Cloud Vineyard

Crunchy, green, vegetal aromas lead the way in this bone-dry rendition of Bacchus. In the mouth, flavours of fresh asparagus and pea shoot are followed by hints of celery on the finish. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 11.5%**



Chartham, Bacchus, Kent 2018 83

£13.95 Angela's of Margate, Chartham Vineyard, Macknade Fine Foods, The Goods Shed

Made by the team at Litmus Wines, this third vintage of Bacchus from Chartham shows ripe yellow stone fruit and tropical notes on the nose, while the palate is dry yet attractively supple and fruity. **Drink 2019-2020 Alc 12%**



Hattingley Valley, Entice, Hampshire 2018 89

£22.50-£25.50/37.5cl Caviste, Great Western Wine, Hattingley Valley, The Naked Grape

Lusciously sweet, the grapes hand-picked and frozen for a month before pressing. Floral, ripe and juicy with fragrant elderflower and white peach flavours. **Drink 2019-2021 Alc 10%**