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ENGLISH SPARKLING WINE COME OF AGE?

Tom Stevenson sets the surprisingly rich historical scene for a tasting of various vintages of English sparkling wine shared with Essi Avellan MW and Anthony Rose, a lineup that confirmed the country's remarkable progress

We tend to think of English and Welsh wine as a relatively recent phenomenon. But while world-class English sparkling wine is certainly that, the vineyards in this country date back as far as the Roman times of the 2nd and 3rd century AD.

Evidence of at least 20 Ancient Roman vineyards exists, primarily in the southeast, though the largest and most extensively excavated site is as far north as Wollaston in Northamptonshire. By 1086, the Normans had recorded 46 English vineyards in the Domesday Book, many of which were owned by Norman nobles and had either been recently planted or extended. Only one quarter of the vineyards belonged to monasteries, mostly Benedictine, but many more would be planted by the monasteries of various orders as they followed in the wake of William's pope-blessed invasion of 1066.

Fortuitously for the Normans, they had brought a wine culture to an otherwise ale-swilling country during what is now known as the Medieval Warm Period (c.950–1250 or 800–1400, according to different sources), whose benign conditions eased the spread of monastic vineyards throughout Kent, Sussex, and Hampshire in the southeast, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, and Worcestershire in the southwest. In *De Gestis Pontificum* (written in 1125 but published much later), the historian William of Malmesbury was particularly impressed by the Vale of Gloucester, stating, "No county has more or richer vineyards, or which yield greater plenty of grapes, or of a more agreeable flavour. The wine has a not disagreeable sharpness to the taste, as it is little inferior to that of France in sweetness."

FORTUITOUSLY FOR THE NORMANS, THEY HAD BROUGHT A WINE CULTURE TO AN OTHERWISE ALE-SWILLING COUNTRY DURING THE MEDIEVAL WARM PERIOD, WHOSE BENIGN CONDITIONS EASED THE SPREAD OF MONASTIC VINEYARDS

Medieval English vineyards probably peaked between 1150 and 1348, the latter date coinciding with the first and most rapid decimation of the population by the Black Death. This would mark the beginning of a 600-year decline of English viticulture, exacerbated by recurrences of the plague (the last being 1665), the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536–41), and an increasingly colder climate (the so-called Little Ice Age from the 16th to the 19th century).

By 1509, when Henry VIII (whose impressive wine cellar is beautifully preserved beneath government buildings in London today) was crowned, the number of vineyards had dropped to 139, according to Hugh Barty-King, who tells us that 11 were owned by the Crown, 67 by noble families, and 52 by the Church. Either Barty-King could not count, or the balance was owned by non-nobles.

In 1662, six years before Dom Pérignon set foot in Champagne, Christopher Merret described the process used by English vintners to intentionally turn "all sorts of wines"

fully sparkling by use of a repeatable second fermentation ("stum perform"). Merret did not specify Champagne, but as the term "sparkling Champaign" (sic) was first used by Sir George Etherege just 14 years later, and that was 40 years before the French retrospectively claimed Dom Pérignon had invented sparkling Champagne some 20 years earlier, it is reasonable to assume that still Champagne shipped in barrels would not only have been one of those "sorts of wines" but it would also turn out to be by far the most suitable. Merret did not mention bottling the wine either, but Etherege talks about going to the park with "champaign," and he was hardly referring to people lugging barrels of the stuff. Furthermore, in March 1679, just four years after Etherege, Pepys, who knew Merret and mentions him coming to dine at his house, notes that he went to Hyde Park in his carriage for "the first time this year, taking two bottles of champagne."

In *The Compleat Vineyard* (William Hughes, London; 1665), written just after Merret and almost ten years before Etheredge, the author discusses wine-producing vineyards in Kent, Essex, and the west of England and asks rhetorically "if the wine be not brisk, how shall we make it without the addition of Sugar, Vinegar, Vitriol to sparkle or rather bubble in the Glass?" raising the intriguing possibility of sparkling wine made from English-grown grapes in the 17th century.

By the 18th century, there were barely 20 English vineyards left. Most historians have concluded that the decline of English viticulture at this juncture was the inevitable consequence of the worsening climate (Little Ice Age),

AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES		
	Average	Range
Tasting	85	70-97
EA	85	70-92
AR	88	82-93
TS	83	70-97

TOM STEVENSON'S TOP WINES	
Greyfriars Blanc de Blancs Brut Surrey 2013 (magnum)	98
Nyetimber Classic Cuvée West Sussex 2010 (magnum)	97
Fox & Fox Essence Pure Chardonnay Brut East Sussex 2011	97
Ridgeview Cavendish Brut Sussex 2013	94
Hattingley Valley Blanc de Blancs Brut Hampshire 2011 (magnum)	93
Greyfriars Rosé Reserve Brut Surrey 2013 (magnum)	92
Ridgeview Fitzrovia Rosé Brut Sussex NV	92
Camel Valley Brut Chardonnay Cornwall 2014	92
Sixteen Ridges Pinot Noir Rosé Worcestershire 2013	92
Wiston Estate Blanc de Blancs South Downs 2010	91
Digby 2010 Vintage Brut 2010	91
Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé Brut Cornwall 2014	91
Woodchurch Blanc de Blancs Brut Kent 2013	91
Hoffmann & Rathbone Rosé Reserve First Release Sussex 2010	91

but if this were so, it would be reasonable to assume that any surviving vines would be confined to the warmest climes of the southeast and southwest of England. The problem with the climate theory is that quite a few vines were growing as far north as Yorkshire. As the famed 18th-century gardener William Speechly wrote in his *Treatise on the Culture of the Vine*, "At Northallerton, in Yorkshire,

there is a Vine now growing that once covered a space containing 137 square yards; and it is judged, that if it had been permitted, when in its greatest vigour to extend itself, it might have covered three or four times that area. The circumference of the trunk or stem a little above the surface of the ground is three feet eleven inches. It is supposed to have been planted 150 years ago but from its great age and from an injudicious management, it is now, and has long been, in a very declining state. There are many other Vines growing at Northallerton, which are remarkable for their size and vigour."

It is now believed to have been planted by the Carmelite friars prior to the Dissolution, which would have made it 250 years old in Speechly's time (1789), and contrary to the great gardener's gloomy prediction of its imminent demise, the Great Vine was still going strong at least 140 years later. Apparently it all but disappeared in the 1970s, and although shoots are said to have appeared shortly after, it is more sensible to believe that Northallerton's Great Vine died in the 1970s at an age of some 430 years—not bad for a country considered too cold for viticulture!

The last truly commercial vineyards planted in this country prior to the post-1945 revival were established in the late 19th century by John Patrick Crichton-Stuart, the 3rd Marquess of Bute and one of the richest men in the world. He planted his first vineyard at Castell Coch (now Cardiff Castle) in 1875 and sold the first vintage (1878) through the Angel Hotel in Cardiff, with later vintages becoming available from London wine merchants. In 1885, the Marquess planted a second, larger

vineyard at Swanbridge overlooking the Bristol Channel, and shortly afterward a third at St Quentin near Cowbridge. Although pleased with his success, the Marquess was refreshingly honest about his own wine and would often say, "You wouldn't want to trade hock for Coch."

On February 6, 1897, *The Spectator* reported, "Lord Bute's vineyards at Castle [sic] Coch, near Cardiff, have produced another great crop. The incessant rain of September made it difficult to gather the grapes dry. But the quantity made from two vineyards—a second is now in bearing at Swanbridge, seven miles from Cardiff—was forty hogsheads, the same yield as that of 1893. The kind of vine grown is the Gamay Noir, used in the vineyards near Paris and in the colder parts of France, and it is planted in rows three feet apart, and trained to stakes four feet high. At the end of the season the vines are pruned close back, leaving only two buds of last year's growth."

The most fascinating aspect of this report by *The Spectator* was its uncanny prediction of the future of UK vineyards: "We need little more to convince us that the vine can be grown in this country to produce, one year with another, enough grapes for vintage. But if English vineyards are ever to succeed we must settle early what kind of wine we mean to make from them. The processes have been for so long a 'lost art' in this country, that we have forgotten that wine as a rule needs very careful 'making' and that its treatment in the process makes an immense difference in character, quality and price."

The report continues, "The quality of the native juice of the Castle Coch grapes must be very high for the process used in their vinification is very simple and the only ingredient added is some sugar, with

probably some spirits to prevent decay. But the result, as we have said before, is a still champagne. This seems to show the direction in which future owners of vineyards in this country may look for profit. They must learn to make, not still champagne, but sparkling wines." And that was written 120 years ago!

The Marquess died in 1900 and was succeeded by his 19-year-old son, John Crichton-Stuart, the 4th Marquess of Bute. All seemed fine until August 1914, when war was declared and it became impossible to obtain the sugar for chaptalization. When peace returned after four years of slaughter that claimed 700,000 English lives, including that of the Marquess's brother Edward, production never resumed.

The modern era

A few vines were planted in 1939 by George Ordish in his garden at Yalding in Kent; a vineyard was planted close by in 1946 by the renowned gardener Edward Hyams in preparation for his book *The Grape Vine in England* (1949); and a vineyard of experimental varieties was planted in 1946 by Ray Barrington Brock at what would become the Oxted Viticultural Research Station. But the first truly commercial vineyard since the Marquess of Bute's 19th-century venture was planted in 1952 by Sir Guy Salisbury-Jones at Hambledon in Hampshire.

As Stephen Skelton MW points out in his *UK Vineyards Guide 2010*, "the revival of commercial viticulture in the early 1950s was based upon the discovery by Brock and Hyams that Müller-Thurgau and Seyval Blanc were varieties that would both fruit and ripen in our climate." And by the 1970s, when I became a wine geek, the very thought of English wine was a joke. As the late, great Peter Ustinov put it, "I imagine hell like this: Italian punctuality, German humor, and English wine."

It needed people like Barrington Brock and Hyams to reestablish UK viticulture in the 1950s, but the broad base of consumers had evolved by the early 1970s and could not understand what was so English about wines made from Müller-Thurgau or Seyval Blanc, let alone the likes of Reichensteiner, Huxelrebe, or Siegerrebe. Cheap holidays abroad had expanded the horizons of ordinary people, and after devouring Hugh Johnson's *World Atlas*

of *Wine* (1971), which was selling like hotcakes, they knew that fine wines were made from classic varieties, if nothing else.

When interested consumers asked why the English were growing German grapes that were shunned in Germany and French hybrids that were illegal in France, they were told it was because nothing else could survive or ripen in the UK's inhospitable climate. The crucial consideration was always a guaranteed crop, never the quality of the wine—until Nyetimber's original American owners, Stuart and Sandy Moss, arrived on the scene in the 1980s. They had this crazy notion of wanting to make a top-quality English fizz from classic Champagne varieties. In preparation for planting their vineyard, the Mosses sought expert advice locally, only to be told that the Chardonnay would not ripen and the Pinot Noir would just rot. They were advised to plant all sorts of crosses and hybrids, but they were not interested. Knowing they would not be able to build an international reputation on such varieties, the Mosses did the damndest thing: They asked the Champenois for help. Who would have thought it? Certainly not any English vineyard owner at that time. Most had trained at Geisenheim, the home of Müller-Thurgau, and asking the French anything would have been the last thing on their to-do list. I had a lot of respect for the late Professor Helmut Becker, who headed Geisenheim, but he did run the funny farm of all funny farms when it came to creating a multitude of boring crosses, and this had an unfortunate effect on how the English wine industry viewed itself at the time.

BY THE 1970S, WHEN I BECAME A WINE GEEK, THE VERY THOUGHT OF ENGLISH WINE WAS A JOKE. AS THE LATE, GREAT PETER USTINOV PUT IT: "I IMAGINE HELL LIKE THIS: ITALIAN PUNCTUALITY, GERMAN HUMOR, AND ENGLISH WINE"

The vines went into the ground at Nyetimber in 1988, and the first commercial wine was produced in 1992. I was completely unaware of this until 1995, when winemaker Kit Lindlar telephoned to ask whether he could bring around a sparkling wine he had made. All he wanted was an honest opinion about whether it was ready to be disgorged, and I said fine, as long as he understood I did not belong to the "the longer the better" school of thought for yeast aging. I told him that in my humble opinion, some of the finest Champagnes could and should be disgorged earlier rather than later, so the odds were (back then) that I would not recommend extended lees contact for any English sparkling wine. But as soon as I tasted the Nyetimber (the identity of which he revealed afterward), its potential for further development was so obvious that I felt compelled to recommend at least another 12–18 months on yeast. At the time I wondered why Kit did not look too happy when I congratulated him on producing England's first world-class wine. It was only later I discovered that his contract with the Mosses was to pay his fee in three equal amounts: the first on signing, the second on bottling, and the third on disgorging. I had just delayed his pay check by more than a year!

Nyetimber 1992 was received with such acclaim when it was launched that it was selected for Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Anniversary Lunch in 1997. This was quite an honor. After all, despite the publicity, no one, beyond an insignificant few in the wine trade, had really heard of Nyetimber. It was a completely new brand and not even English-owned. Yet the legendary reputation of Nyetimber was firmly established, and we can trace the emergence of world-class English sparkling wine directly from these events.

Stuart and Sandy Moss were not the first to cultivate Chardonnay or Pinot Noir in an English vineyard. Nor were they the first to make a traditional-method sparkling wine from these classic varieties. Piers Greenwood successfully grew a tiny amount of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir at New Hall vineyard at Purleigh, Sussex, in 1983 and Kenneth McAlpine used those grapes as part of his sparkling wine blend at Lamberhurst Vineyards. Between Greenwood and the Mosses, there were other pioneers with these Champagne

grapes, but their plots of vines were very small, often poorly sited, experimental in nature, and planted with inappropriate clones that frequently failed to ripen.

The difference at Nyetimber was that the Mosses sought the advice of Champenois Jean-Manuel Jacquinet, who might not have been an outstanding Champagne producer but was certainly a nurseryman who knew his stuff and consequently selected early-ripening clones (such as Dijon Chardonnay clones 95 and 96). The Mosses were no mugs. They also hired Jacquinet to supervise the preparation of the ground and the planting and the training of the vines. If the vineyard did not take, Jacquinet would not have been able to blame the Mosses, and by not employing someone else, the Mosses avoided that person from blaming Jacquinet's cuttings. The first time I visited Nyetimber, I was shocked to see how low to the ground the vines were trained, because while this might be the norm in Champagne, most vineyards in the UK at that time were trained high to avoid ground frost. At Nyetimber, however, there was natural air drainage that swept through the vines and down to the open golf course below.

The first edition of *Christie's World Encyclopedia of Champagne & Sparkling Wine* (1998) included an entry on Nyetimber, but England's viticultural reputation was still "farmers-playing-at-winemakers [with] hopelessly unfashionable grapes [only grown] because nothing else could." And yet by the second edition (2003), English sparkling wine had "a world-class potential," and this sea change took place within just five years. Such was the Nyetimber effect—and the fact that Ridgeview was already snapping at its heels. Few people know that Mike Roberts had taken part in one of Nyetimber's earliest harvests, and what he experienced convinced him to plant what was then the second-largest vineyard of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Meunier vines. Ridgeview chased Nyetimber in those early years, often equaling the UK's premier sparkling-wine producer and sometimes, when Nyetimber went through a patch of dodgy disgorging that left beautiful wines with mercaptan aromas, trouncing it.

Behind the scenes, the English wine industry underwent a total revolution at the turn of the new millennium. The

A NATURALLY OCCURRING GREAT BRUT SPARKLING WINE CAN ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH A LONG-DRAWN-OUT RIPENING PROCESS THAT OCCURS WHEN THE VINE IS GROWN ON A KNIFE EDGE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE

difficulty of marketing amateurish wines made from German crosses and French hybrids had driven a decline in English vineyards—from a high of 1,065ha (2,630 acres) in 1993, to a low of 697ha (1,720 acres) in 2007. In 1995, however, Mike Roberts had planted Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Meunier at Ridgeview, and the international acclaim received initially by Nyetimber and then by Ridgeview attracted the attention of other entrepreneurs and investors, who began buying land and planting it exclusively with these classic Champagne grapes. In 1999 there were just 18,5ha (46 acres) of Chardonnay in the entire country, and most of those were growing at Nyetimber and Ridgeview. By 2006, the total area under vine was still declining, and yet there were more than 91ha (225 acres) of Chardonnay, while there are now 518ha (1,280 acres) of Chardonnay, 448ha (1,107 acres) of Pinot Noir, and 123ha (304 acres) of Meunier (making 1,124ha [2,777 acres] in total).

Until 2002, Müller Thurgau, Seyval Blanc, and Reichensteiner were the most widely planted varieties in the UK, and as recently as 2006, Seyval Blanc and Reichensteiner remained top of the table. Even today, Seyval Blanc is the fourth most widely planted variety, and Bacchus has climbed to number three. Bacchus can make a refreshing dry white, and Seyval Blanc is by far the best of the older established grapes when it comes to sparkling wine, but neither has the international appeal of a sparkling wine made from one or more of the three classic Champagne varieties. So, while it seemed to all intents and purposes that English vineyards were in a steady state of decline up to 2004, the vineyards of

the future were in fact being planted, and the emergence of classic sparkling-wine varieties has hidden just how frantically the crosses and hybrids were being uprooted. There are now 1,839ha (4,544 acres) of vineyards in the UK, thus the 1,124ha of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Meunier represent more than 61 percent of all the vines. But back in 2005 there were only 722ha (1,784 acres), so sudden has been the revolution in English wine.

There are 503 separately owned vineyards in England and Wales, 133 of which have their own winery, and production averages 5 million bottles, but annual yields vary enormously between one million (2012) and 6 million (2014). Not all of the wines are sparkling, of course. For the past few years sparkling wine has been 66 percent of total production, thus it has averaged 3.3 million, with annual yields dropping as low as 330,000 bottles (probably much less because the classic varieties take a much bigger hit than hybrids). Such highly fluctuating yields are hugely problematic, but they are the price the UK must pay for its success. The climate in England and Wales is even riskier than Champagne's (see *WFW* 38, 2012, pp.148–59, "Lemons and Limes," for a comprehensive comparison of climate and ripening data), but a naturally occurring great brut-style sparkling wine can only be achieved through a long-drawn-out ripening process that occurs when the vine is grown on a knife edge between success and failure. And while fluctuating yields might be the price that UK producers must pay, that price can be mitigated considerably by storing reserve wines at low temperature. Reserve wines are not only used for building complexity at the *assemblage* stage, but they may also be deployed to even out irregular levels of production. The Champenois do it: initially through regional *blocage* and *déblocage* since 1938, and then by *réserve qualitative individuelle* in 2008. English sparkling-wine makers should copy the latter, and without any AOC regulations to tiptoe around, there would be no restrictions, making it easy to replicate.

When I am asked by foreign producers and journalists how this country has so rapidly developed such an iconic image and high price for its sparkling wines, I go to great lengths to explain that English sparkling wine's

reputation has been built by a relatively small number of award-winning producers. Many more have clung on to their coattails and benefited from unrealistically high prices for the short term, but some of those have already fallen by the wayside as the marketplace, not the producer, decides how much any wine is worth. This drop-off will continue with the simultaneous emergence of new ventures that are already in the pipeline. All of the most successful English sparkling-wine producers have started up since the Nyetimber phenomenon—either as completely new ventures or as old established vineyards that have ripped up their crosses and hybrids to start afresh under a new regime.

So, to return to the question posed in the title: Has English sparkling wine come of age? The short answer has to be no, there is still a long way to go, and further still for some than for others. But if the best have managed to achieve what they have achieved—with such young vineyards, hardly any reserve wines, and relatively little experience—the future has to be very bright.

The tasting

Since the general aim of this tasting was to see how English sparkling wines aged by style and by vintage (we also invited Welsh vineyards, of course, but for whatever reason none participated), I thought it would be more revealing to break down each taster's scores by these parameters. But even then it does not give the true picture—as always, the devil is in the detail.

In the following table, I have omitted one style (red) and one vintage (2015) because there was just a single sample of each. We tasted by vintage, and within vintage by style, with classic and non-classic varieties tasted separately.

All

This was intentionally a mixed tasting of both style and vintage, and the variable results for all 99 wines reflected this. Although the panel average of 84 is not high, and my average of 82 was the lowest of all three tasters, I gave a score of 90 or higher for 26 percent of the wines, and 88–89 for another 12 percent. A total of 38 percent high-scoring wines demonstrates that the once relatively small number of exceptional producers

THE TASTING								
	Lowest	Highest	All	BdB	BdN	Blend	Rosé	NV
Essi Avellan	70	92	84	86	86	83	86	86
Tom Stevenson	60	98	82	84	86	81	86	82
Anthony Rose	82	93	87	88	88	87	87	88
Panel	75	92	84	86	86	84	86	85

THE TASTING							
	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Essi Avellan	87	83	79	86	86	85	84
Tom Stevenson	87	83	75	83	85	79	75
Anthony Rose	86	87	86	88	89	88	89
Panel	87	85	80	85	87	84	82

has now increased to a significant proportion. English sparkling wines no longer have to be compared to Champagne, but they may be contrasted, because English sparkling wines are to Champagne what Trentodoc is to Franciacorta—not better or worse but simply an expression of terroir that is leaner and more acidic.

Blanc de blancs

The panel found this to be one of the two most successful styles (with rosé being the other), and so did I, even though I had the lowest average. Again, my average is not indicative of how I felt about the performance of this style. It was brought down by seven wines scoring between 70 and 74, whereas I gave nine wines a score of 90 or above, including two of my three highest-scoring wines of the entire tasting: Greyfriars 2013 magnum (98), and Fox & Fox Essence Pure Chardonnay 2011 (97). This was most definitely the most exciting category for me, because the purity, linearity, and acidity of English fruit complements the long, tapering structure and weightless intensity of the classic blanc de blancs style. The other truly great English blanc de blancs in this tasting were Hattingley 2011 magnum (93), Camel Valley 2014 (92), Wiston 2010 (91), Woodchurch 2013 (91), and at 90 points each, Chapel Down Kit's Coty 2013, Bolney 2015, and Coates & Seely 2009.

Blanc de noirs

Only five wines here (a sixth was light-struck, without a backup), thus it is impossible to make any general, let alone definitive, statement. But while a classic blanc de noirs without color is not a style that intuitively suits the English terroir, Camel Valley White Pinot 2014 (albeit with a delightful New World copper hue), Ridgeview Limited Release 2010, and Fox & Fox 2013 were all excellent. If Ridgeview had entered its 2009 Limited Release in magnum, I'm sure it would have been a class apart.

Blend

This was a very large category. Again, I had the lowest average score (just 81), and again this did not reflect the quality of the best wines. For me, the Nyetimber Classic Cuvée magnum 2010 was the clear winner, with an amazing 97. (The 75cl bottle has been on stunning form for years, but the magnum has gradually clawed its way to the top.) But Ridgeview Cavendish 2013 was also outstanding (94), as was to a slightly lesser degree Digby 2010 Vintage Brut (91). After these I had no fewer than eight superb wines on 90: Balfour 1503 NV Classic Cuvée (not only an NV but from Balfour's cheaper 1503 range!), Hattingley 2013 Classic Cuvée magnum, Hoffmann & Rathbone 2010 Classic Cuvée First Release, Jenkyn Place 2010, Nyetimber Tillington Single Vineyard 2010, Ridgeview Bloomsbury 2010, Sugrue Pierre 2010 The Trouble with Dreams, and Wiston 2009.

Non-Vintage

Another category for which I had the lowest average score is Non-Vintage, but for once this mirrors both my scoring and general opinion. This was a substantial class, with 15 wines in total, yet only two wines received a score of 90 or more from me: Ridgeview Fitzrovia NV Rose (92) and Balfour 1503 NV Classic Cuvée (90). Herbert Hall Brut Lot Number 1-2014 NV Brut (88), Coates & Seely NV Rosé (88), and Digby NV Leander Pink (87) all deserve a mention, but the category as a whole illustrates how desperately the entire English wine industry needs to build up reserve-wine stocks. Even when that happens, there will be a sharp learning curve not only in the intelligent use of reserves at blending time but also in the most appropriate means of preserving such wines.

2014

A year where my average score hid great wines—unlike Champagne, where 2014 was one of the worst in recent history, in England it was one the most successful vintages ever, with an early, warm and dry harvest. At the time, Bob Lindo of Camel Valley described it as “the vintage of dreams,” and three years later his son's wines dominated the top end of the 2014s we tasted: Camel Valley 2014 Chardonnay (92), Camel Valley 2014 Pinot Noir Rosé (91), Harrow and Hope 2014 Rosé (89), and Camel Valley 2014 White Pinot (89).

2013

A very large and typically late, cool, and wet harvest, this was the most prolific vintage of the tasting, represented by no fewer than 31 wines. My average of 83 might not be impressive, but individual wines were, including the highest-scoring wine of the tasting: Greyfriars Blanc de Blancs 2013 magnum (98), not to mention other stunners such as Ridgeview Cavendish 2013 (94), Sixteen Ridges 2013 Pinot Noir Rosé (92), Greyfriars 2013 Rose Reserve magnum (92), Woodchurch 2013 Blanc de Blancs (91), Ridgeview 2013 Rose de Noirs Limited Release (90), Hattingley 2013 Classic Cuvée magnum (90), and Chapel Down 2013 Kit's Coty Blanc de Blancs (90).

2012

Whereas 2014 was one of Champagne's worst years and one of England's best, 2012 was the opposite: a truly outstanding

year for Champagne (at least as good as 2008), yet diabolical for England. I thought the best was undoubtedly Camel Valley 2012 Pinot Noir Rosé, but nothing like as good as it was a couple of years ago.

2011

An early flowering caught by six weeks of rain led to a poor fruit-set, and by the beginning of September, 2011 was looking to be a very miserable vintage. But thanks to the Indian summer that kicked in from mid-September and lasted until mid-October, English vineyards yielded the ripest, lowest-acid Chardonnay on record. No wines express that potential any better than Fox & Fox 2011 Essence Pure Chardonnay (97) and Hattingley 2011 Blanc de Blancs Brut magnum (93), but Wiston 2011 Rosé (89), Hoffmann & Rathbone 2011 HR Blanc de Blanc (88), and Exton Park 2011 Blanc de Blancs (88) all deserve a bit of the glory.

2010

This was the second most prolific vintage submitted to this tasting, with 50 percent of the wines scoring 90 or over on my sheet, including one of my three top wines of the tasting: Nyetimber Classic Cuvée 2010 magnum (97), Hoffmann & Rathbone 2010 Rosé Reserve First Release (91), Digby 2010 Vintage (91), Wiston 2010 Blanc de Blancs (91), Sugrue Pierre 2010 The Trouble with Dreams (90), Ridgeview Bloomsbury 2010 (90), Nyetimber 2010 Tillington Single Vineyard (90), Jenkyn Place 2010 (90), and Hoffmann & Rathbone 2010 Classic Cuvée First Release (90).

HAS ENGLISH SPARKLING WINE COME OF AGE? THE SHORT ANSWER HAS TO BE NO. BUT IF THE BEST HAVE ACHIEVED WHAT THEY HAVE—WITH YOUNG VINEYARDS, HARDLY ANY RESERVE WINES, AND LITTLE EXPERIENCE—THE FUTURE HAS TO BE VERY BRIGHT

2009

Although I was the lowest scorer for the 2009s, we tasted just five examples from this vintage, and I obviously made a typing error when scoring the Digby 2009 Reserve, as it bears no resemblance to my short but positive note about its extreme youthfulness. This was a record crop at the time, with high ripeness, and I suspect that my average score would have been much higher had Nyetimber submitted their 2009s. I have always preferred Nyetimber 2010 to 2009, but that was merely a preference—Nyetimber's 2009s were, and still are, superb. I scored only two wines 90: Coates & Seely 2009 Blanc de Blancs and Wiston 2009.

Any surprises?

If I weigh this tasting against what was my considered overview of English sparkling wine, I would have to say that it has not changed much, other than to add its own delightful surprises. I still hold the view that under Cherie Spriggs and her husband Brad Greatrix, Nyetimber is the most professionally run and consistently highest-quality winery in the country, with Camel Valley, Gusbourne, Hambledon, Hattingley, Ridgeview, and Wiston its main contenders. Following this group, a number of wineries that are also capable of making world-class sparkling wines include Balfour, Bolney, Castlebrook, Coates & Seely, Cottonworth, Furleigh, Hennes, Herbert Hall, High Clandon, Hoffmann & Rathbone, Jenkyn Place, Plumpton, Sugrue Pierre, and Wyfold. In the very recent past, we have seen names like Digby or Squerreyes emerge from nowhere to beat all comers, and at this year's Champagne & Sparkling Wine World Championships, Adler Ridge and Harrow and Hope have come to light. What this *WFW* tasting has achieved is to add its own surprises: Fox & Fox (Essence Pure Chardonnay), Greyfriars (Blanc de Blancs), Sixteen Ridges (Pinot Noir Rosé), and Woodchurch (Blanc de Blancs). They will be on my radar from now.

Note: I would like to add a big thank-you to Sam Lindo for kindly submitting two versions of Camel Valley Brut, one with SO₂ when disgorged and one without, even though he knew the latter would be punished for its oxidative character. It was very instructive to taste these blind.

Nyetimber Classic Cuvée West Sussex 2010 (12% ABV; magnum) | 92

EA: Promising, beautifully toasty nose, with ripe apricot fruit. Lovely intensity on the stylish, integrated palate. Freshness, length, energy. | **90**
AR: Pale lemony bronze: attractive. Intense stone-fruit flavors, with a nice ripe peachy freshness of fruit and well-textured ripeness counterbalanced by a tangy infusion of zesty fresh bubbles, finishing nicely balanced and refreshing. | **89**
TS: This has a freshness that rises above other equally complex sparkling wines in this tasting so far. Just has so much going for it. Great now; even greater in 10 years! | **97**

Digby 2010 Vintage Brut 2010 (12% ABV) | 90

EA: Stylishly reserved nose, with crisp green and yellow fruit: pear drops, lemon, and yellow apple. Tight, focused, driven palate, with high acidity and plenty of nervousity. Racy and brightly fruity. | **87**
AR: Pale lemon, with a clean, almondy aroma, still youthfully fresh on the palate, the mousse full-flavored and apple crisp, with a vinous quality that's mouthwateringly tangy and refreshingly full of citrus zest, and a saline dry fruitiness. | **91**
TS: Lovely, fresh, exhilarating fruit, with fine notes of yeast-complexed aromas. Very fresh, long, lean, and tapered. | **91**

Fox & Fox Essence Pure Chardonnay Brut East Sussex 2011 (12% ABV) | 90

EA: Sweaty unfresh nose, woody, with vanilla and flowers. Rich, ample palate, with a sweet finish. Fleshy and round, with a fluffy mousse. | **85**
AR: Pale lemon, an attractive nose with some complexing nutty and toasty notes, nicely evolving palate of lightly toasty fruit, with a gentle, persistent, full-flavored mousse tapering to a crisp and elegantly dry finish. | **89**
TS: Extremely intense, almost a concentrate of blanc de blancs, with an essence of lime to the fruit. Very, very long. Astonishing! | **97**

Greyfriars Blanc de Blancs Brut Surrey 2013 (12% ABV; magnum) | 90

EA: Highly floral nose, with lemon and vegetal notes. Better on the palate: a supple, seamless structure and acidic bite on the finish. | **84**
AR: Pale in color, with fresh, distinctive aromas, quite intense; distinctively different on the palate, with a crème fraîche aspect and hedgerow-fruit flavors balanced out by a zesty finish. | **87**
TS: Absolutely gorgeous! Lovely lemony-toasty fruit aroma. Classy, long, great intensity and finesse. | **98**

Hattingley Valley Blanc de Blancs Brut Hampshire 2011 (12% ABV; magnum) | 90

EA: Lovely toast-complexed nose with hazelnuts and vanilla. Sweet, pure fruitiness. Fluffy mousse, linear and racy. | **88**

ESSI AVELLAN MW'S VERDICT

Our 99-wine tasting showcased the wide spectrum of styles and qualities of English sparkling wine. Having included wines from eight different vintages and wines from classic and non-classic sparkling-wine varieties, the set was variable, but so were our panel scores. It was striking how the same producer's different wines and vintages performed utterly differently, reflecting both the climatic challenges and probably also the young age of the industry and its operators.

When it comes to English sparkling wine, there are some common characteristics that divide opinion. One of them is the famously high acidity, and the other the green-fruit characters that often prevail in the wines. Each of us surely has our own preference or tolerance levels for them, hence the variable opinions. But this tasting showed that despite the prevailing super-high-acid style, there is a potential and tendency for softer and riper styles. These are stylistic issues, and I quite like brisk wines personally, when there is enough fruit to carry them. The more worrying tendency for me was the high number of oxidative wines.

In stylistic terms, my top 20 was almost equally divided between blends, blancs de blancs, and rosés. The obvious world-class quality of the finest wines does further boost my belief in English sparkling's great future potential.

TOP WINES

Ridgeview Cavendish Brut Sussex 2013

Exton Park Blanc de Blancs Hampshire 2011

Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé Brut Cornwall 2012

Hoffmann & Rathbone Rosé Reserve Brut Sussex 2010

Nyetimber Classic Cuvée West Sussex 2010 (magnum)

Wiston Estate Blanc de Blancs South Downs 2010

Bluebell Vineyard Estates Hindleap Blanc de Blancs Sussex 2009

Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs Traditional Method Brut Kent 2013

Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé Brut Cornwall 2014

Gusbourne Brut Reserve Traditional Method Brut Kent 2013

Balfour Brut Rosé Brut Kent 2013

Digby 2009 Reserve Brut 2009

AR: Pale lemon, still fresh, subtle aromatic notes, light lemon chiffon-like mousse, shot through with a lemon-zesty sherbety tang, intense and well crafted, with attractive flavors. | **88**

TS: Lovely, classic, toasty blanc de blancs! Intense, not weighty, long and fine, supported by a vivacious mousse. An exciting wine. | **93**

Ridgeview Cavendish Brut Sussex 2013 (12% ABV) | 90

EA: Promising nose, with attractive toastiness, even a touch of coffee. Ample appley fruitiness and lots of Pinot depth. Pencil shavings, vanilla, dough, and baking spices. Lovely intensity and vibrancy on the palate, long and succulent. | **92**

AR: Yellow gold in color, a note of hedgerow fruits on the nose, soft, rather anodyne bubbles on the tongue, with a clean streak of acidity that maintains an element of freshness without quite convincing that the balance is 100% right. | **84**

TS: Lovely yeast-complexed aromas. Classic, lean structure, fine fruit and freshness, with a final flick of vanilla. Great English fizz! | **94**

Sugrue Pierre Cuvée Brut 2010 The Trouble with Dreams Brut South Downs 2010 (12% ABV) | 90

EA: Soft, mild, floral nose, with yellow and green fruit. Highly youthful. Zingy palate with vibrant fruit and lots of energy. Razor-sharp acidity cutting the cool fruit. Lovely purity and vivacity. | **88**

AR: Pale lemon, clean, fresh aromas, a hint of nuttiness and light toasty autolysis development, good vinosity on the palate, with nicely rich, full-flavored stone-fruit character etched with zestily cleansing fresh acidity and tapering nicely to a long finish with freshness and finesse. | **93**

TS: Great intensity and complexity. Has vitality, creamy fruit, and lovely high acids. | **90**

Wiston Estate Blanc de Blancs South Downs 2010 (12% ABV) | 90

EA: Soft pure white-fruit nose: refined, restrained. Finely detailed palate, lightweight, elegant, super-refreshing and energizing. Racy and vivid. | **90**

AR: Pale in color, youthful fresh aromatics, clean, crisp, lemony-fresh fruit quality that's still tight and tangy. Hard to tell quite how much this will unfurl to reveal greater layers of complexity, if at all, but impressively youthful nonetheless. | **89**

TS: Enticingly toasty intense blanc de blancs on nose and palate. Rich, yet light and long: lovely. | **91**

Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé Brut Cornwall 2014 (12.5% ABV) | 89

EA: Medium-deep peachy. Lovely toasty layers over plush Pinot fruit. Succulently fruity palate lined with great acidic backbone. Feisty and firm, with length and purity. | **89**

AR: A deepish salmon pink, this is pleasantly fresh in juicy cranberry fruit mold, with more tang than bubbles in the texture, the emphasis on thirst-quenching dry berry fruit for al fresco sipping. | **87**

TS: Pale peach color, with lovely rich yet extremely light fruit. Crisp, long, tapering finish. | **91**

Exton Park Blanc de Blancs Hampshire 2011 (11.5% ABV) | 89

EA: Beautifully toasty nose, layers and layers. Lots of delicious ripe fruit. Fine-tuned, detailed palate. Succulent, linear, racy, and seamless. | **92**

AR: Youthfully pale, a biscuity note on the nose, a zesty and tangy hit of bubbles on the tongue, still shot through with faint biscuity notes of autolysis, and finishing on a tart and tangy dry note. | **87**

TS: This has a peppery-spice aroma on the palate that is interesting, but it detracts from the linear blanc de blancs style. | **88**

Greyfriars Rosé Reserve Brut Surrey 2013 (11.5% ABV; magnum) | 89

EA: Pale peachy color. Peachy fruit on the fresh Pinot nose, with woody character and spicy tones. Something hard about the palate. There is a whiff of oakiness. Long juicy finish. | **85**

AR: Pale salmon hue, appealing strawberryish nose, with a degree of complexity, youthfully fresh dry berry fruit, very well-crafted, fine-textured berry fruit concentration with complexing background notes of spice (oak?) and cherry fruit richness, finishing nicely dry with just a hint of oak spice for complexity. | **91**

TS: Very pale peach-cum-apricot color, hints of oak and Pinot, delicate fruit, fine mousse. Exemplary. | **92**

Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs Traditional Method Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Layered nose with delicate toasty complexity and delicious ripe fruit in opulence. Lovely creamy-textured, soft mousse. Brisk, bright acidity, well integrated to the attractive fruitiness. Long, seamless, and vivacious. | **89**

AR: Pale lemon-gold, attractively fresh nose, with faint nutty undertones, well-crafted fizz with nice balance of orchard-fruit freshness and cleansingly tangy acidity, leading to an elegant dry finish, and given a year or so, it may yet blossom into even more. | **89**

TS: An amazing balance between a good guzzle and a fine wine! Who knows which way it will go? | **89**

Gusbourne Brut Reserve Traditional Method Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Elegant white-fruit nose. Delicate toasty layers. Light-weight, zingy palate, with succulent, juicy fruitiness. Long, linear finish, full of cool fruit. Soft, appealing mousse. | **89**

AR: First bottle corked. Second bottle: Pale in color, a tad shy on the nose, with a hint of stone-fruit showing through, attractive appley fruit quality with nice vinosity and freshness, good weight of refreshingly crisp mousse etched with cleansing acidity for nice freshness. | **88**

TS: First bottle corked. Second bottle fine. Nicely youthful, with intense fruit and a lovely long, tapering finish. | **89**

Hattingley Valley Classic Cuvée Brut Hampshire 2013 (12% ABV; magnum) | 89

EA: Lovely layers of evolution on the nose, cream and pâtisserie. Soft, mellow fruitiness. Round, rich palate with suitably soft mousse. Long, succulent, and deliciously fruity. | **88**

AR: Pale lemon, youthful, possible hint of oak here, no shortage of appetizingly tangy fresh bubbles, even if the acidity is a tad on the bitey side, but the finish is clean and fresh and the balance fair in a Granny Smith bitey sort of way. | **88**

TS: The fruit is a touch exotic, but the structure and length is classically lean and long. | **90**

Jenkyn Place Brut Hampshire 2010 (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Refined, delightfully delicate nose playing with the lightest toasty layers. Cool, crisp fruit. A sweet-and-sour sensation on the palate. Finishes suitably dry. | **87**

AR: Pale lemon, with a good head of persistent bubbles in the glass; a tad shy on the aromatic side, with a hint of evolved toastiness and expansive citrus-fruit quality whose acidity cuts incisively through the appley fruit for a clean, dry, and zesty fresh fizz. | **90**

TS: Wow! Great intensity of fruit with very high ripe acids. Complexity only just beginning to build. Lovely to drink now but should really be cellared a few years. | **90**

Nyetimber Tillington Single Vineyard West Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Nice aging layers of toast and yeast over a delicate soft fruitiness. Yellow apple, hay, apple pie, a mild, under-control oxidative touch. Round, fleshy palate and high acidity. Surprisingly simple on the palate. | **86**

AR: Pale lemon. Good aromatic depth, with a light toasty richness, following through on to the tongue with a well-crafted, expansively textured ripe fruit cushion of tongue-coating bubbles delivering fruit flavor and satisfying complexity and tapering gently to a fine, dry finish. | **92**

TS: Good intensity, lots of fine, complex fruit. Lovely refreshing mousse. | **90**

Ridgeview Fitzrovia Rosé Brut Sussex NV (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Pale peachy color. Delicate nose with fresh berry aromas and candy tones. Fresh and feisty palate. Light-weight with crisp, zingy acidity and a long, slightly sweet finish. Not hugely complex but enjoyable with bright fruitiness. | **86**

AR: An attractive pale salmon pink in color, this shows an attractive fresh berry-fruit quality on the nose, nicely balanced fresh cranberry bitey mousse, and good vinosity. | **88**

TS: Very pale peach. Lovely fresh and fruity style of some elegance and finesse. Not the most complex sparkling rosé, but beautifully constructed for immediate consumption. | **92**

Wiston Estate Cuvée Brut South Downs 2009 (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Slightly sulfitic nose. Crisp white-fruit profile with toast and gunpowder. Lovely intensity on the linear palate. Highly acidic but also full of fruit. | **85**

AR: Pale golden lemon and refreshingly aromatic, this is extremely youthful and tight on the palate, with an appley bite behind a tautly refreshing stone-fruity/peachy ripe mousse cut by a trenchantly zesty, lemony crispness, ending on an appetizingly dry note. Youthful English tang. | **91**

TS: Rich fruit on the palate with toasty aromas on the nose, supported by a fresh and refreshing mousse. | **90**

Wiston Estate Rosé South Downs 2011 (12% ABV) | 89

EA: Pale salmon. Strong, lifted red-fruit nose, on the oaky side. Big, plush palate, with a lot of tart freshness. Lovely texture and a very long, pronounced finish. | **86**

AR: Salmon pink, excellent depth of aroma, a complexing touch of spicy oak, finely textured, rich and concentrated raspberry and cherry fruit quality, with real depth and intensity of flavor and subtle complexity; finishing with attractive balance and elegant tangily dry finish. | **91**

TS: Pale peach. Fresh, zesty fruit on the palate. | **89**

Balfour Rosé Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | 88

EA: Pale peachy color. Elegant, ethereal nose, with peachy fruit and floral tones. Lovely creamy texture and subtle mousse. Fruitiness goes on and on. Lovely energy and purity of fruit. | **89**

AR: Distinctively pale bronzy and halfway to a sparkling blanc de noirs, this shows good aromatic intensity and plenty of appealing redcurrant and cranberry fruit bite as it dissolves on the tongue with a satisfyingly dry cherryish finish. | **88**

TS: Very pale apricot color. Rich, velvety fruit. A lovely wine that could have been even better with a lighter balance. | **88**

Camel Valley Brut Chardonnay Brut Cornwall 2014 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA: Refined nose with restraint. Delicate toasty layers over crisp white fruit melange. Linear and vibrant, with fine salinity on the finish. Brisk and nervy, long and lean, but very young still. | **87**

AR: Youthfully pale in color, shy nose, a touch of mid-plate sweetness, quite soft in texture, the mousse fading rather rapidly, but a pleasantly fresh appley bite on the finish. | **86**

TS: Tastes more like a Chardonnay-dominated blend than a pure blanc de blancs, but excellent anyway when judged as a sparkling wine in its own right. Very long, with an almost indelible aftertaste. | **92**

Camel Valley Pinot Noir Rosé Brut Cornwall 2012 (12.5% ABV) | 88

EA: Medium-deep peachy color. Beautiful, toast-complexed, gunpowdery nose. Super-promising.

Lovely vibrancy, complexity, and deliciousness on the palate. Seamless and charming. | **92**
AR: Pale pinky bronze, pleasant fresh berry-fruit nose, a touch sweet and sour in character, simple, clean, tangy, fresh berry fruit quality. | **86**
TS: Pale peach, creamy-acid fruit. Lacks a lightness of touch. | **85**

Chapel Down Kit's Coty Blanc de Blancs North Downs Kent Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Expressive white-fruit nose, with pear drops, orange blossom, and marmalade notes. Neat palate: ample fruit and balanced freshness. | **87**
AR: Pale in color, with an intriguing nose of sweetness and spice, as if there's a hint of oak; good, rich gooseberryish mousse with attractive flavors, nice juiciness of texture and attractive vinosity, finishing on a clean, dry tangy note. | **88**
TS: Rich and creamy, more Burgundian style. Lifted by a fine mousse. Long. | **90**

Coates & Seely Blanc de Blancs La Perfide Méthode Britannique Brut Hampshire 2009 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Vegetal and fragrantly floral nose. Super-acidic palate, lemon juice! | **84**
AR: Good youthful color, fresh, tight, and aromatic, with faint solids, nutty background notes; promising, expansive fresh mousse on the tongue, ripe and peachy, with nice, refreshingly crisp, citrusy fruit quality, a touch mineral, saline. Still not completely unfurled, suggesting plenty of time to go. | **90**
TS: Young for its age! Very fresh, tight, linear. Impressive! | **90**

Coates & Seely Rosé Méthode Britannique Brut Hampshire NV (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Medium-deep salmon. Stylish nose with built-in complexity. More obvious on the amply dosed palate. Fresh, slightly tart, and invigorating. | **85**
AR: An appealing pale salmon pink, this has depth and intensity on the nose, attractive raspberry and strawberryish flavors on the palate, with an expansive mousse whose textures allow a long, slow delivery of refreshing berry fruit flavor and freshness in an elegantly stylish dry style. | **90**
TS: Pale pink-peach color, with a neutral aroma and exquisite acidity. | **88**

Henners Brut Reserve East Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Yeasty and creamy layers and toast over the ripe apricot and yellow-apple aromas. Round, soft, fruity palate, refreshed by the razor-sharp acidity. | **85**
AR: Pale lemon in color, pleasant nose showing attractive notes of biscuit and brioche; well-crafted fizz with youthfully refreshing, full-flavored mousse of bubbles with a nutty tang that tapers to a satisfyingly balanced, clean finish. | **90**
TS: Well-structured wine, but the fruit is a tad maderized. | **88**

Hoffmann & Rathbone HR Blanc de Blancs Sussex 2011 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Nice melange of toast, yeast, cream, and fruit. Yellow apple and pineapple. Smooth creamy palate, too, with refined mousse. Long finish, with integrated high acidity and appetizing salinity. | **88**
AR: Pale lemon-gold, with nicely evolved, subtly nutty aromas leading to a full-flavored, nutty, dry mousse, with some intensity of flavor, although the bubbles fade just a little more rapidly than the flavor itself. Winey and well balanced nonetheless, and clean and refreshingly dry to finish. | **89**
TS: Good intensity of blanc de blancs, but with peripheral aroma that widens the palate. | **88**

Ridgeview Blanc de Noirs Limited Release Brut Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Deep peach-hued color. Overt nose with some oxidative touches, bruised apricot and marmalade. Full and round, suitably dosed palate. Plush and generous. | **85**
AR: Relatively evolved in color and on the nose, this is aromatically rich and intense, with an attractively toasty underlay of flavor behind the concentration of fruit, which is nicely poised between ripeness and elegant crispness. | **90**
TS: Pale-straw color with a hint of copper. Rich, vanilla-laden Pinot fruit on the palate suggests that it should be heavy, but it isn't. | **88**

Ridgeview Bloomsbury Brut Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | **88**

EA: Showing evolution and oxidative development on the appley nose. Plump, fleshy palate. Mellow mousse and medium length. | **85**
AR: Starting to show some evolution in its color, this is pleasantly fresh and aromatic, a tad shy though on the nose, with a pleasant broadness of stone-fruit flavor that's quite vinous and pleasing without the hoped-for extra dimension. | **88**
TS: Lovely melange of varieties and yeast-complexed aromas. Still evolving. | **90**

Sixteen Ridges Pinot Noir Rosé Worcestershire 2013 (11% ABV) | **88**

EA: Very pale peachy nose. Delicate yellow-fruit fruitiness with smoky layers. Fluffy mousse on the lightweight palate. Rather short and singular. | **85**
AR: Pale youthful salmon pink in color, nice berry-fruit richness on the nose, cleansing strawberry fruit flavors and juicy texture, with good balance and a satisfying dry finish. | **87**
TS: Very, very pale apricot color, featherweight chocolaty Pinot fruit aromas pervade both nose and palate. Lovely, soft, lingering finish. | **92**

Balfour 1503 Classic Cuvée Brut Kent NV (11.5% ABV) | **87**

EA: Mild, delicate nose with leesy softness. Yellow apple fruit with pastry undertones. Surprisingly sweet and obvious on the palate, with soft mousse. The nose promised more. | **85**

AR: Pale lemon shot through with a golden streak, clean and fresh on the nose, if on the bland side. Pleasantly crafted bubbles with nice refreshing acidity, albeit somewhat lacking in personality overall; a nice drink that you don't have to think too hard about. | **86**
TS: Cleverly constructed blend with some reserves, I would think. Freshness and complexity. Richness without weight. Satisfying mouthfeel. Lovely mousse. Drinking perfectly now but should age gracefully for a few years. | **90**

Bluebell Vineyard Estates Hindleap Blanc de Blancs Sussex 2009 (11.5% ABV) | **87**

EA: Youthful lemony color. Delicious pear and apple fruit on the glossy, bright but soft nose. Delicate creamy-toasty layers. Seamless, supple palate, suitably crisp and vivid. Very youthful still, but has delicious fruit. | **90**
AR: Pale lemon in color, pleasing stone-fruit aromatics, and equally pleasant balance of clean, fresh, appley fruit and juicy acidity in a nicely balance, youthfully fresh framework of bubbles and acidity. | **88**
TS: Nice, fresh, pure, but lacks something in the middle... Might become complete with food, but scored in isolation. | **84**

The Bolney Estate Blanc de Blancs Brut Sussex 2015 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA: Very youthful nose, pear and white flowers. No autolytic complexity. Neatly made but super youthful. Quite sweet at the finish. | **85**
AR: Very pale in color, extremely youthful on the nose with apple and citrus undertones, almost Sauvignon-like, crisp and fresh and pleasantly dry, albeit a touch vapid on the mid-palate. | **86**
TS: For a young blanc de blancs, this is very good. Youthful, fresh, fruity aromas. Surprisingly creamy on the palate and finish for such youth. | **90**

The Bolney Estate Cuvée Rosé Brut Sussex 2014 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA: Pale peachy color. Delicate peachy fruit, pretty and pure. Soft, creamy palate, with finely balanced acidity. Subtle, delicious, and zesty. | **88**
AR: Pale salmon pink, youthful berry-fruit aromas, aggressively youthful spritz, clean berry fruit flavors with a touch of off-dry sweetness counterbalanced by a tangy dry finish. | **86**
TS: Very pale peach color, with nice, fine, fresh, but diffused fruit. | **86**

Camel Valley White Pinot Cornwall 2014 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA: Pale peach-hued color. Youthful, fruit-forward, plush Pinot style. Fresh, and feisty palate, high acidity, but there is enough fruit to tame most of it. A fruit-bomb. | **87**
AR: Pale coppery tinge, some pear-drop and berry fruit on the nose, youthful berry fruit that's fresh and crisp, if a bit too biting and tart on the finish. | **85**

TS: Pale with a hint of copper, very fresh fruit, lovely acids and an attractively light structure. Vibrant mousse. | **89**

Chapel Down Three Graces Traditional Bottle Fermented Brut Kent 2011 (12.5% ABV) | **87**

EA: Stylish nose, with soft, ripe fruit. Apricot, yellow plums, and some yeasty complexity. Round, overt palate and calm, soft mousse. Medium-long finish. | **87**
AR: Pale gold, crème-fraîchey nose, a hint of autolytic biscuity development in the mousse, which is nicely textured and well crafted with balance and freshness on the finish; nicely approachable now. | **88**
TS: Nicely yeast-aged fruit with brandy notes. Not sweet by any means, but there does seem to be a candied character on the finish. | **85**

Digby Leander Pink NV (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Pale peachy color. Fresh, fruity nose, with candy tones, blood orange and apricot, highly youthful. Zingy, searingly acidic palate. Lightweight and fruity but tart! | **85**
AR: Pale salmon pink, lovely fresh berry-fruit nose, inviting and intriguing, with a finely textured, cranberry bitey crisp mousse and juicily refreshing, elegantly balanced tang on the finish. | **90**
TS: Lovely pale peach color, piquant fruit, high acids, and a classic lean structure. | **87**

Fox & Fox Tradition Blanc de Noirs Brut East Sussex 2013 (11% ABV) | **87**

EA: Evolving nose with red-fruit depth, spices, and cheesy elements. Succulent juicy fruitiness on the high-acid palate that finishes rather sweet. | **86**
AR: Pale coppery bronze, attractively fresh nose, with a hint of nuttiness, nicely intense, fresh, full-bodied and flavored fruit, with complexing nutty background notes and tangily crisp dry finish. | **88**
TS: Straw color with the barest hint of copper. Overt fruit, a bit chunky, fine mousse. | **87**

Gusbourne Rosé Traditional Method Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Medium-deep peachy color. Soft nose, with delicate, cool, crisp fruit. Fruit-packed palate with juicy fruit and lovely freshness. Suitably dosed and long-lingering. | **86**
AR: Pale salmon in color, this shows attractively fresh and juicy red-berry fruits character with a fair degree of fruit concentration that brings an element of vinosity and texture to quite a winey dry English rosé. | **88**
TS: Pale peach-apricot color, a bit heavy on the palate and rather rich on the finish. | **86**

Harrow and Hope Brut Rosé 2014 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Delicate salmon color. Restrained red-fruit nose with chalky nuances. Succulent, with fresh

strawberry fruitiness. Crisp but balanced and nicely textured palate. | **86**
AR: Salmon pink in color, pleasantly fresh cherry-fruit aromas, with juicy cherry and strawberry fruit flavors, clean, youthful, and refreshingly dry. | **86**
TS: Very pale pink-peach. Very fresh, elegant, lightly rich fruit, with a long finish and a creaminess on the aftertaste. | **89**

Herbert Hall Brut Lot Number 1-2014 Brut Kent NV (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Baked-apple and yellow-fruit nose with little evolution. Soft, mouth-filling palate, nicely integrated. Compact and in tune from the beginning to the end. Quite sweet, though. | **87**
AR: Pale lemon, restrained hedgerow fruit and floral notes on the nose; nicely balanced mousse of persistent bubbles, with refreshing acidity balancing out pleasingly textured mousse, nicely contained without ever hitting the high notes. | **87**
TS: Lovely wine in terms of structure, texture, and mousse, but a tad sweet and too youthful in an amylic sort of way. Hard to know how to judge this since it is just three steps away from being a great English NV; just needs older reserves, more time on yeast, and more post-disgorgement aging. | **88**

Hoffmann & Rathbone Classic Cuvée First Release Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Mild, youthful pear-and-soap nose; muted. Fresh, crisp palate, better than the nose. | **84**
AR: Pale lemon in color, a tad shy on the nose, expansive citrusy mousse on the tongue, which is zesty in a sherbet-lemon sort of way, while the zesty mousse just starts to fade on the finish before the flavors build. | **86**
TS: Fine, yeast-complexed fruit aromas give way to classic, lean-structured, yeast-complexed fruit on the palate. | **90**

Langham Classic Cuvée Reserve Brut Traditional Method Dorset 2011 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Pale peachy hues. Oaky notes on the ripe fruity nose. Very intense palate, takes the wood well. Bright fruit, very little oxidation. Long, pronounced finish, with succulent fruit and a brisk bite of acidity. | **87**
AR: A pale coppery streak runs through this fizz, most likely a note of oak-cask fermentation, which manifests itself in a light vanilla spiciness on the palate, which is vinous with a mix of nutty and tangy notes on the finish. | **88**
TS: Hint of copper, candied Pinot-dominant fruit, with a hint of oak. Has the structure of a very fine sparkling wine. Although it has plenty of time on yeast, it needs more yeast-complexing. | **87**

Woodchurch Blanc de Blancs Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Super-youthful nose, not giving much, a bit sulfitic. Stays closed on the palate, too. Fresh, with a fluffy mousse and soft, suitably dosed finish. | **84**
AR: Very pale and youthful in color, a faint floral

note on the nose, pleasant weight of bubbles, with fair balance of peachy fruit ripeness and cleansing acidity, albeit lacking a degree of weight, intensity, and complexity. | **87**
TS: Water white, light in weight, almost ethereal fruit, yet distinctive—really quite intense. | **91**

Woodchurch Rosé Brut Kent 2014 (12% ABV) | **87**

EA: Very pale peachy color. Some leesy layers over ripe red berry fruit and pencil shavings. Fresh and firm, with nicely integrated high acidity. A bit coarse in its mousse. Long, fruity length. | **87**
AR: A very pale bronzy pink in color, this is youthful, fresh, and fruity on both nose and palate, showing good textural vinosity and freshness, with attractively young berry fruit flavors and a clean, refreshingly tangy, dry finish. | **88**
TS: Very pale apricot, with much richer fruit on the palate than expected, yet still light and long. | **87**

Harrow & Hope Brut Reserve NV (12% ABV) | **86**

EA: Soft leesy notes over yellow apple fruit. Really accentuated acidity takes the lead role. Long, linear, and feisty. | **86**
AR: Pale lemon in color, good persistent bead, expressive aromatic power, fresh. Notes of vanilla, spice, stone fruit. Good, rich, full mouth-filling mousse on the tongue, expanding into the mouth with lovely richness of apple and stone-fruit flavor. Good balanced vinosity, dissolving gently toward a mouthwateringly bone-dry finish. | **92**
TS: Intense and sharp to the end, without any green character. Authentic English orchard fruits on the palate. Fine mousse and acidity. | **80**

Henners Brut East Sussex 2011 (12% ABV) | **86**

EA: Stylish nose, with smoke and toast, lactic characters, too. Fine, linear, focused structure and enough length. Nice, fine-tuned whole. | **87**
AR: Pale in color; fine nutty aromas with a hint of brioche. Well-crafted fizz, with expansive, full-flavored appley mousse etched with cleansing citrusy acidity, while retaining a light toasty-rich flavor and finishing with a mouthwateringly, zestily clean dry tang. | **92**
TS: Simplistic core of fruit, with notes of bruised apple and cigarette ash. | **78**

Herbert Hall Brut Rose Lot Number 1-2014 Brut Kent NV (12% ABV) | **86**

EA: Medium-deep salmon color. Lovely, expressive Pinot fruit on the exuberant nose. Cherries and strawberries. Firm, substantial palate, with fine freshness and fruit intensity. Delightful style. | **88**
AR: Going for the full strawberry pink in color, this is youthfully fresh and berry fruity on the nose, with soft and juicy, almost off-dry strawberry fruit in cleansing fresh mode, if not overly complex. | **87**
TS: Fresh, light, easy, youthful fruity style, but a bit short and simple. | **83**

High Clanton The Aurora Cuvée Grand Vintage Rosé Brut Surrey 2011 (12.5% ABV) | 86

EA: Pale peachy. Soft mellow nose, peachy. Delicate crisp fruitiness. Medium-bodied palate, something smoky chalky about it. Succulent and smooth-textured, sweet medium length. | 86
AR: Pale bronze, pleasantly fresh berry fruit, with a touch of cherryish sweetness, pleasantly dry, cleansingly refreshing finish. | 86
TS: Very pale copper-apricot color, with fruit that is rather exotic (oaky?) and a firm fizz. | 87

Hoffmann & Rathbone Rosé Reserve First Release Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | 86

EA: Medium-deep peachy color. Opulent Pinot nose with a touch of cheese and leesy layers. Sweet, candied palate, almost cloying. | 83
AR: A deepish salmon pink, showing some age; broad aromas and flavors, hollow mid-palate—needs drinking up. | 84
TS: Peach color. Beautifully rich, with a wonderful slowly evolved toastiness on the finish. This is a very classy wine. | 91

Ridgeview Blanc de Noirs Limited Release Brut Sussex 2013 (12% ABV) | 86

EA: Deep lemon-gold color. Supple, mellow nose with depth. Red apple, apricot, and wax. Pronounced palate with plenty of fruit. Mouth-filling and chewy, with great invigorating freshness. Showing some evolution. | 87
AR: Pale bronze gold in color, evolved, well made. Ripe peachy fruit, with good vinosity and stone-fruit flavors. Overall, well balanced if not particularly complex, and finishing juicily dry. | 88
TS: An enticing tad of oak, rich Pinot fruit. Good, but could be a bit lighter in weight and purer in fruit. | 84

Ridgeview Rosé de Noirs Limited Release Brut Sussex 2013 (12% ABV) | 86

EA: Medium-deep peachy color. Some vegetal notes alongside peachy fruit. Sweet palate, unnecessarily so. Medium-bodied, with nice creamy texture and suitably long length. | 84
AR: Pale pink in color, decent berry-fruit quality, albeit slightly hollow fruit middle. | 84
TS: Pale apricot color, intense fruit and acidity, yet so light! | 90

Wiston Estate Cuvée Brut South Downs 2013 (12% ABV) | 86

EA: Soft red-fruit nose, red apple, yellow plums, and bready tones. Full-on fruity palate. Round and succulent, with balanced acidity but quite a sweet-feeling finish. Ample and fresh with some complexity. | 87
AR: Pale bronze in color, the nose is curious, the bubbles are soft and bland, and the finish on the tart and green side, and although young in age,

ANTHONY ROSE'S VERDICT

I expected to come away from this tasting with my teeth chattering, but as it turned out, it was my mouth that was doing the enthusiastic chitter-chatter—which isn't to say that there wasn't ample acidity or sugar. Indeed, my dentist commented soon after on a degree of acid erosion of my teeth. Be that as it may, the natural tang that's etched into English sparkling wine is one of its main features, and as this tasting showed, it's a uniquely positive feature when it's balanced, but negative when it strays into trenchantly enamel-stripping tartness. An occasional imbalance of sugar or *goût anglais* oxidation were also among less welcome features. Along with terrific tang and zest, the best of these English sparklers displayed fine aromatic

characters, often with toasty or nutty notes, a mouth-filling, creamy-textured mousse of bubbles, frequently with orchard-fruit flavours, and a purity and vinosity that takes them beyond the apéritif style into the realm of food wine. Producing world-class fizz, the most successful exponents are clearly on top of the art of the cuvée, whether Vintage or Non-Vintage, and given the potential for greater complexity as stocks of reserve wines become available, it's an exciting category. So, too, is blanc de blancs with its Chardonnay creaminess and finesse, while the charming rosé-tinted glass of pink English fizz is more than a glass half full of liquid strawberry, cherry, and raspberry. I know mine is, even if it doesn't stay that way for long.

TOP WINES

Sugrue Pierre Cuvée Brut 2010 The Trouble with Dreams Brut South Downs 2010 **93**
 Ridgeview Grosvenor Blanc de Blancs Brut Sussex 2010 **93**
 Nyetimber Tillington Single Vineyard West Sussex 2010 **92**
 Harrow & Hope Brut Reserve NV **92**
 Hennes Brut East Sussex 2011 **92**
 Digby 2010 Vintage Brut 2010 **91**
 Greyfriars Rosé Reserve Brut Surrey 2013 (magnum) **91**
 Wiston Estate Cuvée Brut South Downs 2009 **91**
 Wiston Estate Rosé South Downs 2011 **91**
 Digby 2009 Reserve Brut 2009 **91**

Bluebell Vineyard Estates Hindleap Blanc de Blancs Sussex 2010 **91**
 Jenkyn Place Brut Hampshire 2010 **90**
 Coates & Seely Blanc de Blancs La Perfide Méthode Britannique Brut Hampshire 2009 **90**
 Hennes Brut Reserve Brut East Sussex 2010 **90**
 Ridgeview Blanc de Noirs Limited Release Brut Sussex 2010 **90**
 Coates & Seely Rosé Méthode Britannique Brut Hampshire NV **90**
 Digby Leander Pink NV **90**
 Exton Park Rosé Pinot Meunier Hampshire NV **90**
 Smith & Evans Pinot-Chardonnay Somerset 2010 **90**

it is somewhat dull and lifeless. | 83
TS: Estery, fine, long, good vitality. Enjoyable. | 87

Woodchurch Classic Cuvée Brut Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | 86

EA: Pale lemon color. Youthful floral nose with pear and apple fruit. Fluffy, lightweight palate with delicate fruitiness. Still very much on the primary fruit with little evolution. Medium-long, fresh finish. | 86
AR: Youthfully pale bitter lemony hue, with greeny glints, clean, fresh, youthful on the nose, pleasantly balanced fresh mousse with a touch of sweetness and fair length of flavor, if just lacking another dimension of complexity, but very approachable despite its relative youth. | 87
TS: Water white, with creamy fruit supported by a creamy mousse, but a bit simplistic. | 84

Balfour 1503 Rosé Dry Blanc de Noirs Kent NV (11.5% ABV) | 85

EA: Pale salmon color. Sweet, simple strawberry and cherry fruit. Highly youthful. Fresh, vibrant palate but very sweet at the finish. | 84
AR: A pale salmony pink in color, this shows primary fresh apple and pear notes on the nose, with an off-dry fruitiness that's sweet

and sour in style and, to my mind, just a tad out of the required balance. But quite commercial nonetheless. | 86
TS: Pale peach color, fresh yet somewhat diffused fruit aromas on both nose and palate, with a clean sweet-brut finish. | 85

Breaky Bottom Cuvée Koizumi Yakumo Brut Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | 85

EA: Soft appley and leesy nose with pastry tones. Fruity, bright and brisk palate. Nicely dosed, not too sweet. Long juicy and succulent palate. | 85
AR: Strikingly yellow gold in hue, clean and fresh, with little in the way of aroma leaping from the glass; simple sweetish and sour Bramley apple fruit and bite in linear mode, with decent tangy finish. | 85
TS: Nicely yeast-aged fresh-fruit aroma; good acidity and mouthfeel. Quite long. Not heavy. | 85

Camel Valley Brut Cornwall 2013 (12.5% ABV) | 85

EA: Fruit-forward appley and grapey nose, with sweet fruitiness. Semi-aromatic nature. Feisty on the palate, with big mousse. Sweet medium-long finish with smoky tones. | 84

AR: Pale yellow color, broad bready aromas. A persistent mousse, with a note of creaminess on the mid-palate, good fresh acidity, and a dry finish. | 87
TS: Fresh and lively aroma, a touch oxidative, but very clean and soft fruit. | 85

Danebury Cossack Vintage Brut Hampshire 2011 (12% ABV) | 85

EA: Mild muted nose. Yellow apple, apricot, and white flowers. Less refined on the slightly hard, edgy palate. Finishes dry. | 84
AR: Still quite a shy nose, and not much going on in the glass, either, unless this is simply the restraint of youth. A decent, clean, dry mousse, which is balanced if on the slightly bland and anodyne side. | 85
TS: Would be flavorless but for the slightly chemical taste. | 60

Digby 2009 Reserve Brut (12% ABV) | 85

EA: Stylish coolly fruity nose with sulfitic complexity. Lovely toasty layers over apple, lemon and apricot fruit. Driven palate with lovely soft, creamy mousse. Accentuated acidity, but there is fruit to back it up. | 89
AR: Youthfully pale in color, this is also tight and youthfully fresh on the nose, with underlying nutty, solids-like notes. The palate is citrus-crisp and refreshingly full-fruited, with a youthful, clean, tangy tautness whose full potential seems yet to be fully realized as it tapers nicely to a tangy dry finish. | 91
TS: Water white with green notes in the fruit still showing through eight years later. | 75

Hoffmann & Rathbone Blanc de Blancs First Release Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | 85

EA: Fragrant white-flower nose with vegetal notes, pear and vanilla. Lightweight palate, fresh and zesty. Better on the palate than on the nose. Searing lemony finish. | 85
AR: Pale in color, fresh, restrained aromatics; tart green-apple fruit on the tongue. Lean streak of acidity on the finish, a tad tart and hard and lacking in charm. | 85
TS: Oak and Chardonnay clash, removing the purity expected of a blanc de noirs. | 84

Hoffmann & Rathbone Rosé Reserve Brut Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | 85

EA: Deep salmon color, with copper tones. Full-on rich Pinot style. Superb toastiness. Firm, rich palate with fine acidity and long lingering finish full of delicious fruit. | 91
AR: Bronzey pink in color; raspberry aromas, echoed by a pleasant, soft, well-crafted raspberry fruit quality; nicely textured, clean, dry, berry-fruit mid-palate, with a balanced, refreshingly dry finish. | 88
TS: Peach colored. Too acidic on the palate for its (absence of) fruit. | 77

Nutbourne Nutty Brut West Sussex 2013 (12% ABV) | 85

EA: Pale peachy hue. Soft, youthful peachy nose. Nice but simple fruitiness. Less appealing on the palate. Coarse mousse. Smoky tones on the finish. Short and clumsy, sweet finish. | 83
AR: Paleish pink tinge veering toward rose; a faint hint of berry on the nose. A touch of sweetness on the tongue before the tangy dry finish kicks in quite nicely and keeps the palate refreshed. | 88
TS: Touch of color, nice soft mousse, just a little simplistic, but easy enough to drink. It has a nice linearity to it. | 83

Bluebell Vineyard Estates Hindleap Blanc de Blancs Sussex 2010 (11.5% ABV) | 84

EA: Something dull about the nose, but it blows off over time. Chalky mineral and vegetal notes on the soft, white-fruit nose with varnish. Intense with creamy texture and stylish mousse. Long, quite sweet, searing finish. | 86
AR: Pale lemon; nutty solidsy notes on the nose. Fine youthfully intense rich peachy fruit on the palate, with an opulent, textured mousse that's imbued with a subtle yet full-flavored toastiness that tapers stealthily toward a satisfyingly rich yet mouthwateringly tangy dry finish. Flavor and finesse are the watchwords here. | 91
TS: Good balance, but a glue aroma sticks from nose to palate, finish, and aftertaste! | 74

Denbies Cubitt Blanc de Noir Surrey 2013 (12.5% ABV) | 84

EA: Rich apricot fruit showing evolution. Red fruit and pencil shavings. Overt, round, chewy palate, plush fruit and fine freshness. Hollow toward the end, some hardness. | 85
AR: Coppery bronze, notes of herb and gooseberry on the nose; classic English hedgerow fruits on the palate, a distinctive flavor, tangy, crisp, and dry; overall pretty well balanced and refreshing. | 88
TS: Straw color and straw aroma. If not for the mousse, it would be a bit lifeless. | 80

Denbies Greenfields Brut NV Surrey (12% ABV) | 84

EA: Some bruised and dusty notes on the nose. Yellow fruit and wild flowers. Quite ample on the sweet, round palate of forward fruitiness. | 85
AR: Pale in color, nicely rich and invitingly aromatic, with some underlying apple and nutty notes, good, rich, weighty, full-flavored mousse of appley bubbles, with lively streak of refreshing acidity, all nicely balanced between creamy texture and refreshingly crisp tang on the finish. | 89
TS: Lactic creamy-caramel aromas fleeting through the nose and fruit. | 77

Ridgeview Blanc de Blancs Single Estate Brut Sussex 2011 (12% ABV) | 84

EA: Odd dusty aromas. Oxidative, waxy and appley aromas. Big, plush palate and a sweet finish. | 81

AR: Quite evolved in color, with a quinine and ginger-like bouquet and light toasty note of evolution, nicely fruited mid-palate that's complex and evolved, with vinosity and nutty complexity and behind it all a lean streak of acidity adding trenchant dryness and balance. Just starting to head downhill now so needs drinking up. | 87
TS: Lacks freshness and precision. | 84

Ridgeview Bloomsbury Brut Sussex NV (12% ABV) | 84

EA: Refined nose with delicious fresh pear and apple fruit. Stylish pastry layers. Appealing linear structure with highlighted but non-aggressive acidity. Lovely sweet-and-sour sensation. Lots of energy on the vibrant palate. | 88
AR: Pale lemon, quite shy on the nose, initially quite tart and tangy on the tongue, with a cleansing mousse that's still etched with those tangily bitey dry notes and clenches the tongue on the finish in mouthwatering style. Could just do with a bit more aroma and flavor. | 87
TS: A light and linear structure, with fresh aromas and green-pineapple fruit. | 77

Balfour Leslie's Reserve Dry Kent NV (12% ABV) | 83

EA: Mild, fine-tuned, yellow-fruit nose, with nice yeasty and toasty layers. More obvious on the plump palate, with a foamy mousse and a sweet finish. | 85
AR: Pale lemon in color, shy nose, good persistent bead, well-crafted mousse, with just a touch of sweetness to sugar the countervailing pill of fresh acidity and a mousse that's satisfying while not particularly long on flavor or weight. But there's balance here. | 87
TS: Fresh with sweet, chunky fruit. Simple. | 77

Bluebell Vineyard Estates Hindleap Late Disgorged Blanc de Blancs Sussex 2008 (11.5% ABV) | 83

EA: Developed lemon-gold color. Brioche-type evolution on the nose, with flowers, hay and delicate nutty aromas. Sweet palate with honey tones. Long, sweet, almost cloying finish. | 85
AR: Evolved in color and aromatics, and yet still a tad closed on the nose, showing a fair degree of peachy ripeness on the palate. Good concentration of fruit richness supported by nicely textured bubbles and juicy acidity. As much a wine as a fizz, good with seafood and shellfish—even a fish curry. | 89
TS: A bit weighty, lacks freshness, lacks zip. | 74

Coates & Seely Brut Reserve NV Méthode Britannique Brut Hampshire NV (12% ABV) | 83

EA: There is some complexity on the nose, with smoky and leesy layers. Highly acidic palate, with lean structure and sweet-and-sour sensations. Long, succulent, and brisk. | 86
AR: Pale lemony green in color, some intensity and crème fraîche freshness on the nose, with restrained bottle-developed notes, initial tartish

malic bite on the tongue followed by persistent, clean, refreshing mousse etched with tangy streak that's just about the right side of eyewatering. | **89**
TS: Long and linear in construction with an oakiness pervading the fruit. Some green touches. Acids out of balance. | **74**

Exton Park Rosé Pinot Meunier Hampshire NV (11.5% ABV) | **83**

EA: Peachy color with onion-skin hues. Aging aromas on the peachy and marmaladey nose. Strong palate, nice creamy texture, but the acidity comes across as tart. | **84**
AR: A pale bronzy pink in color, this is gently smoky and berryish on the nose, with an expansive fresh raspberry mousse that's refreshingly crisp, tangy, and dry. | **90**
TS: Pale apricot color, toasty aroma, and mellow fruit just turning broad bean or asparagus. | **74**

Herbert Hall Brut Lot Number 1-2013 Kent NV (12% ABV; 37.5cl) | **83**

EA: Evolving nose with pastry notes and ripe apricot and apple fruit. Succulent on the palate, with a soft, slightly foamy mousse. Quite straightforward, though. Medium length, with slightly obtrusive sweetness. | **86**
AR: Pale lemon hue. A distinctive nose, showing some biscuity development allied to hedgerow fruit. There is a good full-flavored richness of mousse, which expands nicely on the tongue before tapering to a balanced, appetizing dry finish. | **88**
TS: The structure and balance are fine, but an aroma of cigarette ash pervades both nose and palate. | **74**

Hoffmann & Rathbone HR Classic Cuvée Sussex 2013 (12% ABV) | **83**

EA: Pungently floral nose with a lot of lift to it. Unpleasant. Simple, strong, sweet palate. Lacks refinement. | **84**
AR: Pale in color, the nose here is verging on the aldehydic; there's some mid-palate sweetness and the bubbles are fair if rather tart and pinched on the finish. | **82**
TS: An enjoyable English sparkling wine that has plenty going for it but lacks precision. | **84**

Smith & Evans Pinot-Chardonnay Somerset 2013 (12% ABV; magnum) | **83**

EA: There is nice complexity on the nose. Pastry, toffee, and gentle spicy tones. Rich apple fruitiness showing evolution already. Full, round, fruity palate. Nicely integrated acidity. | **87**
AR: Surprisingly developed in its golden color, possibly showing a touch of oak fermentation, which doesn't show on a slightly dull nose, and the palate, too, is rather soft, bland, and lifeless, which doesn't augur well for a wine of its relative youth. | **83**
TS: Noticeable yellow color, with a good mousse of fine bubbles and intense, but undeveloped, fruit flavors. | **78**

Three Choirs Classic Cuvée Bottle Fermented Brut Gloucestershire NV (12% ABV) | **83**

EA: Very pale, almost watery color. Super-youthful nose, with no aging characters. Highly primary with pear, lime, and grass. Clean fruitiness. Big explosive mousse. Quite balanced palate but needs time. | **85**
AR: Pale lemon, shy nose with little happening here, pleasantly appetizing mousse with some Granny Smith bite and a clean, dry finish. | **86**
TS: A very fresh and simple style, but enjoyable if rather amylic. Would have been much better with another 12 months on yeast. | **78**

The Bolney Estate Cuvée Noir Brut Sussex 2011 (12.5% ABV) | **82**

EA: Deep cherry color. Fragrant red- and dark-berry nose, with tar and spices. Little tannin on the medium-bodied fresh palate. Fresh and ripe enough. Surprising and curious. | **84**
AR: Looks like a sparkling Shiraz or Lambrusco, so more noir de noirs, this has nice juicy black-cherry and loganberry-fruit freshness, with typically English dry tang on the finish adding freshness. | **86**
TS: Solid brick-red color, now a bit heavy in bottle but would have been much fresher. | **75**

Camel Valley Brut Cornwall 2013 (12.5% ABV; 24 months on lees, no SO₂ at disgorging) | **82**

EA: Strong appley and floral nose with a touch of oxidation and dustiness. Round, sweet palate with accentuated acidity. Simple, sweet style. | **83**
AR: Quite good aromatic intensity, with a distinct attempt at a Champagne style, some apple and yeasty notes, nice-textured mousse, soft and appley, with good cleansing dry bite on the finish and a degree of bottle-aged complexity. | **89**
TS: Unattractive oxidative aroma, some bitterness on the palate, lacks elegance. | **74**

Chapel Down Kit's Coty Coeur de Cuvée Extra Brut North Downs Kent 2013 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: Some dusty notes over ripe, soft apricot fruit. Fruity, round palate with balanced acidity. Medium-long finish, with all pieces neatly at place. | **87**
AR: Pale in color, still youthful; fruity on the nose, with appley and gooseberry fruity undertones, a soft mousse that fades quite quickly, and a clean, refreshing orchard-fruit finish. | **86**
TS: Just about to turn into a broad bean/asparagus style... | **74**

Denbies Cubitt Blanc de Blancs Surrey 2013 (12.5% ABV) | **82**

EA: Expressive fruity and floral nose, with a touch of toastiness. Full, round palate, with a sweet finish masking most of the brisk acidity. | **86**
AR: Pale in color, quite gooseberry fruit on the nose but with a nice complexing toasty dimension

to it that follows through on to the palate in a textured mousse that combines full-flavored gooseberry-fruit intensity with a degree of nuttiness and balanced dry finish. | **89**
TS: Will go broad bean or asparagus! | **70**

Exton Park Rosé Hampshire 2011 (11.5% ABV) | **82**

EA: Pale peachy. Soft mellow peachy nose. Dirty chalky whiffs to it. Medium-bodied fresh palate with a long finish but on the sweet side. | **84**
AR: Pale bronzy pink, restrained aromatics, clean fresh berry-fruit quality, with a pleasantly juicy touch of sweetness, nicely tangy and fresh on the finish. | **87**
TS: Very pale apricot, but the fruit is rather thin and acidic. | **75**

Fox & Fox Inspiration Blanc de Blancs Brut East Sussex 2013 (11.5% ABV) | **82**

EA: Deep golden color. Strangely floral, unconventional nose. Pungently aromatic. Big sweet palate. | **79**
AR: Yellow gold in color, with a distinctively musky note on the nose. It's equally strange on the palate, seeming more like a wine made from hybrid grapes than Chardonnay. | **82**
TS: Good, and I would not decline a glass at a reception, but it's not special in any way. | **85**

Greyfriars Classic Cuvée Brut Surrey 2013 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: Stylish nose with layers. Smokiness, toastiness, and cool white fruitiness. Finely integrated whole. Stylish mousse, crisp acidity, and has both length and width. | **87**
AR: Pale lemon, a brioche hint of autolysis on the nose. Pleasantly textured mousse whose lively acidity gives it nice shape in the mouth, while the crisp tang on the finish keeps it fresh. | **88**
TS: Too chemical! | **70**

Harrow & Hope Blanc de Blancs 2013 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: Lovely mellow toast-complexed nose. Fine-tuned delicate aromatics. Intensely fruity palate with big acidity and long vibrant finish. | **88**
AR: Pale in color; pleasant gooseberry and orchard fruit on the nose. Clean, fresh orchard fruits. No great complexity here, but there's a nice juiciness of mousse and refreshing clean tang that makes this fizz pleasantly drinkable. | **87**
TS: Another wine with a tendency to go broad bean or asparagus. The only difference here is the oak, and very good oak it is, too. | **70**

Leckford Estate Vintage Brut Hampshire 2013 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: Overt, sweetly fruity nose with candy tones. Round, fluffy palate. Quite simple. Medium-long, sweet finish. | **85**
AR: Youthful pale greeny-yellow hue, youthful nose, a hint of autolytic nuttiness, distinct touch

of sweetness on the palate initially, with soft texture and as-yet-undeveloped flavors, but overall a fair balance, and it is likely to improve in bottle as it ages. | **87**
TS: Touch oxidative. Bland fruit. | **75**

Ridgeview Bloomsbury Brut Sussex 2008 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: There is a VA lift to the nose. Lots of oxidative evolution on the apple-and-pastry nose. Full and rich, with big acidity persisting. | **82**
AR: An evolved yellow gold in color, this is nutty and toasty in aroma, with a nicely soft cushion of full-flavored bubbles whose peachy flavors are tinged with an attractively evolved toastiness. A fizz that's at its peak and needs drinking now. | **88**
TS: Not so much old before its time as tastes its age... | **75**

Ridgeview Grosvenor Blanc de Blancs Brut Sussex 2010 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: Oxidative and waxy honeyed notes on the nose showing evolution. Toasty layers. Rich, round age-mellowed palate. Drying finish with nutty flavors persisting. | **84**
AR: A pale lemony gold in color. The nose immediately strikes you as rich and complex and inviting all at the same time, with plenty of evolved nutty and toasty character. Champagne-like, even, fine, full-flavored orchard-fruit quality imbued with spice and toast and streaked with refreshing acidity in a balanced framework of fruit and freshness. | **93**
TS: Oxidative. Lacks purity and finesse. | **70**

Sixteen Ridges Signature Cuvée Worcestershire 2013 (10.5% ABV) | **82**

EA: Very pale greenish color, with a foamy rim. Pungent smoky nose, with slightly unpleasant floral aromas. Flat palate with very few bubbles. Round and sweet. Very simple. | **81**
AR: Very pale in color, almost water white; rather bland and shy nose, little emerging from the glass, initial tart malic bite on the tongue softened by a touch of sweetness for a sweet-and-sour effect. | **85**
TS: Oaky, with an esterification that suggests it needed more time on yeast. The fruit is strangely exotic. Good acids. | **80**

Smith & Evans Pinot-Chardonnay Somerset 2010 (11.5% ABV) | **82**

EA: A bit sweaty on the floral nose of pastry and hay. Wide and fleshy palate with unpleasant aftertaste. Some oxidative touches. Bizarre. | **82**
AR: Pale golden lemon in color, this is showing some distinctly evolved nutty notes on the nose, with an attractive dry nuttiness of fruit on the palate, too, and a tautness of texture whose youthful freshness is distinctly tangy and mouthwatering. | **90**
TS: Very good raw material, apparently, but spoiled by lactic aromas. | **75**

Danebury Cossack Vintage Brut Hampshire 2010 (11.5% ABV) | **81**

EA: Straightforward appley nose with some aging notes and leesy richness. Surprisingly muted on the palate. Sharp and feisty, differs from the nose. Slightly unpleasant floral smoky finish. | **83**
AR: Pale lemon in color, pleasant faint floral blossomy note, shy fruit, simple linear fizz with some apple-core touches, clean and dry, fading out rather quickly on the palate. | **84**
TS: A slightly rubbery aroma, but strangely not unpleasant. Very good, silky mousse, but rather thin, with bitter spikes on the palate. | **75**

Sharpham Sparkling Blanc Brut South Devon 2014 (12% ABV) | **82**

EA: Highly smoky floral nose. Funky, unpleasant. Sharp palate with high acidity dominating. | **83**
AR: Pale in color, quite broad on the nose, and a tad on the blunt side. The palate starts out sweet and sour and continues in that vein. | **84**
TS: Green fruit through and through. | **75**

Breaky Bottom Cuvée Gerard Hoffnung Brut Sussex 2009 (12% ABV) | **80**

EA: Oxidative, dull nose. Bruised apple and toffee. Big plump palate with a sweet finish. | **80**
AR: Still youthfully pale in color, this is showing some evolved toffee-apple and light toasty notes on the nose, following through on the palate with *goût anglais* notes of toffee and just starting to evolve in texture into almost a winey dry white with a tangy dry finish; just a tad overevolved. | **84**
TS: Not as bad as it sounds, but the fruit catches at the back of the throat, and a touch of oxidation pervades the nose through to the finish. | **76**

Davenport Limney Estate Brut East Sussex 2013 (11.5% ABV) | **80**

EA: Soft, leesy nose, with baked apple, candy, and vanilla; a touch of oxidation. Brisk palate, round and flavorful, where the acidity lingers. | **84**
AR: Pale lemon in color, distinctive nose, more like a still dry white with a hint of solids nuttiness going on. A malty, nutty note on the palate, nicely mouthwateringly dry, with clean and juicy appley fruit and tangy finish. | **87**
TS: Bottle stink and oxidation aromas. Second bottle also has a touch of bottle stink, so it is more intrinsic to the wine than what that usually infers. No oxidation aromas, but it tastes as if the sugar was added yesterday, which of course it was not. Just too many questions... | **70**

Ridgeview Blanc de Blancs Single Estate Brut Sussex 2013 (12% ABV) | **80**

EA: White-fruit opulence on a slightly sulfidic nose. Sharp acidity dominates the sour palate. | **85**
AR: First bottle corked. Second bottle: Shy nose, rather rapid middle, with tartish acidity. | **84**
TS: First bottle: Very slight cigarette ash at the back of the throat. Second bottle: ditto. | **70**

Ridgeview Cavendish Brut Sussex 2009 (12.5% ABV) | **80**

EA: Deep peach-hued color. Lots of ripe fruit on the nose, with pastry and yeasty complexity. Lots of evolution on the big palate, some oxidation. Medium finish. | **83**
AR: Quite evolved old-gold color. Evolved notes of apple and nuttiness on the nose, followed by pleasing vinosity on the palate, which tapers to a pleasantly dry finish, if slightly overevolved. | **86**
TS: First bottle deepish, copper-tinged; oxidized aroma and flat fruit. Old before its time. | **70**

Smith & Evans Pinot-Chardonnay Somerset 2011 (12% ABV) | **79**

EA: Pale peach-hued color. Strange, lifted, floral nose. Sweet marmalade and orange blossom. Fluffy palate is better than the odd nose. | **80**
AR: Pale coppery tinge, curious nose and fruit, rather heavy and on the dull side. Not quite redeemed by its tangy aftertaste. | **83**
TS: Hint of copper, with a distinctive aroma that is hard to define but not appealing to this taster, although quite drinkable in an unthinking way. | **75**

Davenport Limney Estate East Sussex 2012 (12% ABV) | **78**

EA: Fragrant, floral nose with odd cream and varnish notes. Strange. Very acidic. | **77**
AR: Pale lemon, showing little on the nose. The palate starts out rather sweet and sour and continues in that vein creating a rather unbalanced sweet-and-sour effect that's one-dimensional. | **84**
TS: Rubber and acidulated fruit, but it is not as bad as that sounds! | **74**

Ridgeview Bloomsbury Brut Sussex 2012 (12% ABV) | **78**

EA: Deep golden color. Truly oxidative. Second bottle slightly better. Super acidic. | **75**
AR: Yellow gold and already quite evolved in color, perhaps with a touch of barrel fermentation here. This also shows a strong note of nutty, malty development on the nose, which also suggests a touch of oak. The palate is distinctive all right, with gooseberry fruit and a kind of old-fashioned *goût anglais* evolution that contrasts with its English tang. A Marmite fizz. | **89**
TS: Deep gold color—so oxidative! | **70**

Henners Rosé Brut East Sussex 2012 (12% ABV) | **75**

EA: Medium-deep peachy color. First bottle seems light-struck, but an intense palate with boosted fruitiness; long, sweet, fruit-forward finish. Second bottle also light-struck... Faulty. | **70**
AR: Deepish in color, quite evolved, veering toward oxidation, with a touch of off-dry sweet-and-sour fruit. | **84**
TS: First bottle smelly. Second just as bad. | **70**

Note: The following wine was deemed faulty (light-struck?) by two of the three tasters: Jenkyn Place Blanc de Noirs Hampshire 2010.