

Why You Should Give English Sparkling Wine a Try

English sparkling wine has defied doubt and developed into a crisp, expressive option that eloquently represents the unique wine region it is from.

BY ANNE KREBIEHL MW



Chapel Down / Photo courtesy of Chapel Down



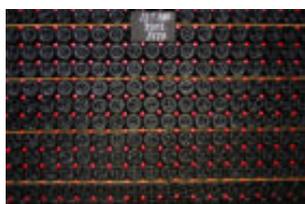
It is exciting to chart the development of a new wine region. Even more so when that region now makes world-class wines and has defied both ridicule and doubt in doing so. Yes, I am talking about English sparkling wine.

The entries hail mainly from the southern English counties of Kent, Sussex and Hampshire but also from the West Country counties of Dorset and Cornwall. The cool but mild climate is well-suited to growing grapes destined for crisp but expressive sparkling wines made in the traditional method. Like most marginal climates, spring frost, poor weather during flowering, rain and hail can all have severe effects on yield, but when things work out, the fruit is pristine and precise.

The vast majority of the wines submitted are based on the traditional sparkling grape varieties: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. The eagle-eyed will have spotted a few instances of blanc de blancs, testament to what Chardonnay can achieve in Cool Britannia. The exuberance of English Pinot Noir is nowhere near as apparent as in the rosés.

Making sparkling wine is a particularly capital-intensive business for those starting out. It takes at least three to five years for new vines to bear fruit and then it takes further years of lees ageing in bottle before a wine can be released and sold. Most estates thus had no choice but to bottle their entire vintage production and not permit themselves to hold back reserve wines which usually give both depth and consistency to nonvintage blends.

This is slowly changing. The vintage-dated wines, still the majority in our intake here, are thus true representations of their years: Most have spent considerable time on lees, which gives them great autolytic depth and helps to tame the brisk English acidity—a true hallmark of these wines. Seek them out; surprise your friends and yourself with some classy fizz from this Sceptered Isle.



10 Champagnes Under \$40

Recommended English Sparkling Wine to Try

Blanc de Blancs

Gusbourne Estate 2013 Blanc de Blancs (England); \$80, 94 points. A restrained but pure note of lemon constitutes the nose, suggesting both tangy zest and juicy flesh. The subtle mousse of tiny bubbles and a sonorous backdrop of autolysis counters all of this freshness and allows it to blanket the senses with its shimmering, lemony but also creamy briskness. That luminous lemon core leaves a lasting impression on the palate. Purity, slenderness and elegance are its hallmarks. Lovely now this wine will age with grace. Drink 2017–2025. Broadbent Selections, Inc.

Hoffmann & Rathbone 2011 Blanc de Blancs (England); \$56, 94 points. A touch of blossom honey enriches the tart but ripe apple notes of the nose. On the palate that honeyed touch turns into lemony, golden shortbread while the tart apple notes are joined by fresh, ripe lemon. Thousands of tiny, pin-prick bubbles make for a creamy, elegant mousse. The contrast between honeyed, autolytic richness and bright, pure citrus is a joy. This wine is exciting and elegant, drawing you to its mellower, richer core. The purity on the finish is luminous and long. Primrose Fine Wine.

Bolney Wine Estate 2014 Blanc de Blancs Brut (England); \$50, 92 points. A touch of wet stone reaches the nose even before appetizing lemon hints make themselves known. This wine is restrained and fresh with lemon and brightness. The palate adds more depth and a grounding of creamy autolysis, but it remains slender, lithe and refreshing throughout. Fine bubbles disperse bright flavors everywhere. The lasting finish is pure. Vine Street Imports.

Brut

Wiston Estate Winery 2013 Cuvée Brut (England); \$40, 94 points. A toasty touch of brioche joins ripe red and yellow-apple notes on the nose. The palate has even more of that autolytic richness, grounding both tart red apple and ripe lemon notes. Fine and creamy, the mousse highlights the fruit freshness while an earthier, toastier, richer background shimmers through enticingly. This harmonious and complex sparkler majors on beautiful development and pristine freshness. Lovely now, it is certain to develop further. Drink 2017–2025. K&L Wine Merchants.

Chapel Down NV Brut (England); \$40, 92 points. The purest notion of Golden Pearmain apples is beguiling on the nose, promising fruit and mellowness in equal measure. The palate with its superfine and creamy mousse does not disappoint. Creamy, rich autolysis and ripe yellow apple create an elegant, generous and bright midpalate that's full of flavor and depth. It's harmonious, hitting that intersection of freshness and richness perfectly and finishing long. ABCK Corp.

Gusbourne Estate 2013 Brut Reserve (England); \$60, 93 points. A generously ripe touch of apricot hovers before blending in with ripe Amalfi lemon and Granny Smith notes. Brightness and light seem to be at the core of this wine. The mousse is exuberant and flavors are brisk and urgent. Subtle autolysis provides a calm backdrop to all the lively, fruity action in the foreground. The balance is harmonious and flavors are brisk, fruity and pure. The long-lasting finish conveys seriousness. Lovely now, the wine will evolve with bottle age. Drink 2017–2022. Broadbent Selections, Inc.

Rosés

Nyetimber NV Rosé (England); \$65, 94 points. Pure notes of red apple rise from the glass, promising freshness, tart briskness and mellow fruit. A hint of shortbread conveys body and generosity. All of this comes together on the rounded palate that has the aromatic lift of rosehip tisane. Mellow autolysis gives the central freshness a generous background. Red-berry fruit flashes amidst the red-apple notes with appetizing tartness. This is a rounded but compact package that takes freshness onto a higher, elegant plane, finishing with enticing saltiness. Lovely now, it's sure to develop. Drink 2017–2027. Valkyrie Selections.

Wiston Estate Winery 2014 Rosé (England); \$44, 94 points. Evocative redcurrant notes play on the nose. They become more intense on the palate where lively fizz lets them mix with lemon and pink grapefruit zestiness. This wine is lively and fresh but the exuberant surface is supported by a firm and taut structure of subtle autolysis that provides the perfect backdrop for all the tart, refreshing berry fruit. It offers freshness, joy and verve in one tidy, neat package. Lovely now, it will develop. Drink 2017–2025. K&L Wine Merchants.

Exton Park Vineyard NV Rosé (England); \$43, 93 points. Notions of tart redcurrant play on the nose while a delicious edge of white pepper draws you in. The same pepper entices on the palate, framing fresh, tart berry and lemon purity on the slender but memorable palate. A firm structure makes this spicy, energetic and invigorating little number irresistible. The fine mousse has verve and elegance. It finishes pure and long. Primrose Fine Wine.

Hush Heath Estate 2013 Balfour Brut Rosé (England); \$45, 92 points. Blossom honey, a touch of melon and fresh, fragrant red-apple fruit make for an appetizing nose. On the palate these alluring flavors are joined by the generous, rounded notion of sponge cake. Towards the finish the pure freshness of bright lemon takes over, and fine bubbles offer fruit and creaminess. It's a balanced and appetizing rosé with a lasting, beautifully yeasty finish. Vine Street Imports



About the Author

ANNE KREBIEHL MW

@AnneInVino

Contributing Editor

Reviews wines from Austria, Alsace and England

German-born but London-based, Anne Kriebiehl MW is a freelance wine writer contributing to international wine publications. She also lectures, consults and translates and has helped to make wine in New Zealand, Germany and Italy. She adores acidity in wine and is thus perfectly suited to her Austria/Alsace/England beat. Her particular weaknesses are Pinot Noir, Riesling and traditional-method sparkling wines.

Email: akriebiehl@wineenthusiast.net.

