



# RATHFINNY

## AN INTRODUCTION TO RATHFINNY

The Rathfinny Wine Estate, established in 2010 by Mark and Sarah Driver, produces Sussex Sparkling wines that rival the best traditional method sparkling wines in the world.

The first Sussex Sparkling wine produced conforming to the strict Sussex PDO guidelines, ensuring quality wines from Sussex, were bottled in early 2015 and were released in the Summer of 2018.

As well a wine producer, the Estate is a popular destination for visitors, walkers and wine enthusiasts. In the Winery, the Cellar Door offers organised Vineyard tours and an opportunity to taste and purchase wine. Also within the Winery is the Tasting Room restaurant, awarded The Plate Michelin 2020 run by head chef Chris Bailey. With large panoramic windows and balcony overlooking the Vineyard, open seven days a week and serves a seasonal menus using locally sourced ingredients to match our wines.

Along with the construction of the stunning, Sussex Heritage award winning and RIBA nominated Winery in the heart of the Estate, the original Rathfinny farmhouse the Flint Barns have been sympathetically restored into comfortable accommodation for both visitors and seasonal workers. Accommodating up to 31 people in ten separate en-suite rooms it is real 'home away from home' with full English breakfasts, comforting weekend meals and sumptuous Sunday lunches. Private events and specialist tastings can be arranged.

Sarah Driver, co-owner of Rathfinny said: "The world of wine is as much about providing a great experience as about producing fantastic wines and that's what we aim to give everyone that visits the Rathfinny Wine Estate."

The Rathfinny Estate is located between Brighton and Eastbourne, in the South Downs National Park, an area of outstanding natural beauty in Southern England. It occupies the main part of Cradle Valley, on a south-facing slope close to the iconic Cuckmere Valley and just three miles from the sea and half a mile south of the beautiful village of Alfriston.

As well as being a stunning site, the Rathfinny Vineyard is perfect for growing sparkling wine grapes: The light, thin, clay loam soils over chalk, are free draining and very similar to the Champagne region of France, perfect for growing sparkling wine grapes. The chalk provides a ready source of water for the vines and a heat sink to aid ripening. The warm semi-continental climate and long summer days ensure perfect ripening and the proximity to the sea helps mitigate frost risk, a major problem in cooler climate vineyards in northern Europe.

The Rathfinny Wine Estate has become a major employer in the area, providing full time skilled employment to over 35 people and seasonal work for a further 150 during late summer harvest and winter pruning. This has had obvious knock-on benefits to the local community.

Environmentally friendly and sustainable buildings - all the buildings are built with materials sourced from the local area. Rathfinny has adopted sustainable technologies such as photovoltaic

cells which power the Winery and wastewater recycling. The Estate is self-sufficient on water and nearly self-sufficient on energy.

We encourage walkers to visit the Estate and have worked with the National Trust and the South Downs National Park Authority to open the 'Rathfinny Trail', a permissive path along Cradle Valley and through the Vineyard. It is marked with 'talking posts' that give information to the visitor.

Investing in the future of English wine – as well as providing training to all our staff, Rathfinny Estate sponsored the 'Rathfinny Research Winery' at Plumpton College, to enable further research to be carried out to benefit the English wine industry.

Rathfinny Wine Estate – producing world class Sussex Sparkling wines to rival the best in the world.

*Mark and Sarah Driver*

## RATHFINNY WINE ESTATE - FURTHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### NAMES

The name Rathfinny was the name of the original farm, which was acquired by Mark and Sarah Driver in 2010 specifically to grow grapes for sparkling wine. Cradle Valley runs below Cradle Hill on the west side of the Cuckmere Valley. It is believed that a Mr H.L.Finney acquired Pinchem Down farm in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and changed the name to Rathfinny.

### AREA PLANTED

After eighteen months of careful planning and preparation we planted the first 60,000 vines on a 20ha (50 acres) site in April 2012. Rathfinny have now planted over 380,000 vines on 91ha (227 acres) and over the next six years the Vineyard will grow to approximately 149ha (350 acres) of vines. When at full capacity, the Winery will produce nearly eighty thousand cases of Sussex Sparkling wine per annum, making Rathfinny one of England's most significant wine producers.

### GRAPE VARIETIES PLANTED

Five principal grapes varieties – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris - have been planted at Rathfinny.

Our Sussex Sparkling wine is made principally from the three classic varieties – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, but may include small quantities of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris in the blend.

### WINES TO BE PRODUCED

The first wines were made in 2014. A still wine from that year was released in 2015 under the Cradle Valley label. Our first Sussex Sparkling, a 2014 Blanc de Blancs was released in June 2018.

Mark Driver, co-owner of Rathfinny Estate, said: “We produce small amounts of still wine, but we’re predominately a sparkling wine producer. High quality ‘Sussex’ Sparkling wine requires at least three years to mature in the bottle to develop all those complex flavours, so we’ve had to learn to be patient, but we’re very proud of our first sparkling wines, they taste delicious.” He added: “The first plantings in April 2012 marked the start of a journey for us to create a Sussex Sparkling wine to rival the best sparkling wines in the world. The results so far have been stunning and it can only get better.

“English sparkling wine is already very highly regarded and I hope Rathfinny will be compared favourably with the likes of Bollinger and Pol Roger. We want Rathfinny to be sold not just in the best restaurants in London, but in Paris, New York, Beijing, Tokyo and Hong Kong.

“Our ambition is that in twenty years time you will walk into a bar or restaurant in New York or Beijing and you’ll be asked, ‘would you like a glass of Champagne or a delicious glass of Sussex, I can recommend the Rathfinny.’”

### PERFECT SOIL AND PERFECT LOCATION

Rathfinny lies on a band of chalk that forms the Paris Basin, running up through northern France, crossing through the Champagne region and into Southern England to form the South Downs. The Cretaceous geology consists of chalky deposits made by the skeletal remains of sea creatures over 100 million years ago, which were then heaved upwards tectonically to become

part of the land. For vines, the shallow but fertile, well drained chalky soil is an ideal growing medium for sparkling wine grapes.

The location of the Vineyard on a south-facing slope, just a few miles from the south coast of England, sheltered from the worst of the south-westerly winds by a ridge that runs parallel to the Vineyard, makes it a perfect place to grow sparkling wine grapes.

Cameron Roucher, Estate Manager at Rathfinny, who moved 12,000 miles from New Zealand to be part of the ambitious project, said: “You couldn’t really ask for a better location than this for growing sparkling wine grapes. The soil, the climate, the geography – they are all perfect.” Rathfinny recruited Jonathan Médard, a renowned French winemaker, who had spent the last 10 years working in California, to oversee the design and construction of the new Winery as well as make all of the wines. “It’s the perfect climate to produce world class sparkling wines.”

## **THE RATHFINNY WINE ESTATE ETHOS**

Working with Natural England, the National Trust and the South Downs National Park a programme of improvements is being implemented to enhance the local habitat, while reviving and reclaiming the natural chalk grass downland and creating wildlife corridors to improve biodiversity. The ‘Rathfinny Trail’ was established, allowing the public access to parts of the Rathfinny Wine Estate and running past the restored Flint Barns.

One of Rathfinny’s aims is to provide a sustainable built infrastructure to support the Vineyard. Buildings feature locally sourced oak and flint. A renewable energy strategy has been implemented based on photovoltaic cells so that each building is energy self-sufficient. Ground water is being sourced from the Estate’s own bore hole, purified to remove calcium and microbes. The wastewater produced in the wine making process is treated onsite and released back onto the land. New windbreaks using indigenous hedge plants and trees are being grown to manage the micro-conditions on the slopes of the vineyard.

To support the development of skills that the English wine industry will require as it grows, Rathfinny has helped fund the construction of the new “UK Wine Research Centre” at Plumpton College, part of Brighton University.

Mark Driver said: “The Rathfinny project is not just about making wine: we are committed to supporting the wider ambitions of the English wine industry and that means nurturing the skills it requires to fulfil its potential.”

## **RECENT HISTORY OF WINEMAKING IN ENGLAND**

Climate change, and the work that Plumpton College has done to raise skill levels in the English wine industry has meant that southern England is now producing some of the finest sparkling wines in the world. Ridgeview, Nyetimber, Camel Valley and Gusbourne have, in recent years, all won international awards for their wines. In 2010 Ridgeview based in Sussex won the prestigious Decanter award for Sparkling Wine. This has never before been awarded to a sparkling wine producer outside of France. This has put English sparkling wine on the world stage. Over the last eight years English sparkling wine producers have won more international awards for sparkling wine than any other wine-producing region in the world.

## **SUSSEX PDO**

In 2016 Rathfinny submitted an application, on behalf of the Sussex Wine Producers, to the European Commission to Protect the Designation of Origin (PDO) of Sussex wines. It is our belief that all wines need a sense of place and ours is Sussex. Oz Clarke perhaps best captures

this view when he says... “When you know the place, and the people, a wine will never taste the same again. It can only taste better.”

A wine PDO allows a region to determine the rules that govern the wine making standards for the wines holding that name. The rules adopted govern the quality of grapes that can be used in the wine and the wine-making standards that need to be adopted to gain accreditation under this quality wine scheme. As well as going through an extensive analysis, each wine must pass a strict qualitative analysis by an independent panel of tasters, prior to release. Therefore, only wines that have been accredited can bear the name ‘Sussex’ on the bottle, thereby making it a mark of quality, easily recognised as such by the consumer. Sussex is the first region in England to have applied for a PDO.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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## THE ENGLISH WINE INDUSTRY – AN OVERVIEW

The English wine industry is small with some 400 vineyards spread thinly throughout the southern half of England and Wales. Although there is evidence of Romans growing vines in England, it is only enjoying a recent resurgence - the oldest English vineyards are only about 40 years old.

The United Kingdom is a major consumer, but only a very minor producer of wine. In 2018, WineGB the trade body for the English wine industry, estimates that the UK produced a total of 15.6m bottles of wine, of which over 70% was sparkling wine. This is enough wine to satisfy the British thirst for wine for approximately three days! As the British consume 1.8 billion bottles of wine a year, English wines make up less than 1% of the wine drunk in the UK.

In France, 'Le Fizz Anglais' is now treated with greater respect. French Champagne houses Taitinger and Pommery have both planted vineyards in Southern England, whilst Louis Roederer and Duval Leroy have reportedly been looking into buying land in England. With agricultural land prices in the South of England at a fraction of what they would be in Champagne, (a hectare in Champagne is over €1 million and only £25,000 in England) some people in the wine industry believe that many of the larger Champagne Houses will be investing in the future.

Some of the most prestigious vineyards in England, Nyetimber, Wiston and Ridgeview, are based in Sussex and sell well internationally. Other popular English vineyards including Hattingley, Chapel Down, Camel Valley, Gusbourne and Hush Heath are now successfully selling English Sparkling wine to 26 countries around the world.

### GOOD YEARS FOR ENGLISH WINE

A good year for wine in England is when warm weather encourages an early bud break with sustained sunshine and no late frosts, meaning the grapes will have a long growing season producing good clean fruit with high phenolic ripeness.

A dry period during mid-June for flowering and a warm September are critical, and it is a fine balancing act between vineyards stalling harvest in the hope of more sun to further ripen the grapes and picking before the rain starts.

An Indian summer is fabulous for English wine producers. The late summer heat helps lower the acidity levels and boost sugar levels – leading to a better balance in English grown grapes, perfect for sparkling wine production. The summer of 2018 has been heralded as the vintage of the century.

### TRADITIONAL METHOD SPARKLING WINE PRODUCTION

English sparkling wine is made in the traditional method: After the primary fermentation, the wine is blended and bottled with a small amount of sugar and yeast allowing a secondary fermentation to take place in the bottle, creating the bubbles.

Once the yeast has finished fermenting its 'lees' stay in the bottle which is laid down for a number of years to promote the biscuity characteristics from yeast autolysis. At Rathfinny we tend to leave our wine 'on lees' with a crown cap on the bottle for a minimum of three years.

After the bottle ageing process is complete the neck is frozen and the cap is removed. The pressure in the bottle forces out the yeast lees and a small dose of sugar is then added and the bottle is corked to maintain the carbon dioxide in the solution.

Sparkling wines are traditionally blended from three classic varieties to give different characteristics to the wine: The white Chardonnay gives a fruity taste and from the two reds, the Pinot Noir helps give backbone and the Pinot Meunier adds aromatics and aids autolysis.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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