

The Daily Telegraph

The Daily Telegraph Saturday 23 February 2019

Food & Drink

BRINED, SEALED, DELIVERED / THE 15-MINUTE VEGAN

STEPHEN HARRIS

Putting the flavour back into flavonoids

Page 16



FOR ME: A NOTRE-DAME Chapel Down's new Gin Works bar at King's Cross, London, main; its range of drinks, from wine and beers to spirits, right; the London site, below right



Right now, the multi-million-pound stainless steel cathedral that will be the Curious Brewery is still a building site – albeit a very shiny one – in the centre of Ashford, Kent. But when the new home of the beer arm of Chapel Down, the local wine producer, opens next month, it promises to be quite spectacular. “All our fermenters will go around the outside of the building,” says head brewer Matt Anderson, gesturing towards it. “And there will be a wonderful cascading down the other side.” A waterfall? “That’s the plan.” The five Haldeney-designed building also features some unusual practical modifications. “We’re very close to the railway so planning permission has been quite tricky, and because of where we had to put the building we didn’t have a place for lorries to turn. So we’ve had to build a giant turntable. Also something out of *Thomas the Tank Engine*, but bigger.”

The new brewery is part of Chapel Down’s ambitious expansion strategy. Over the past five years the English wine producer has seriously upped the ante in its wine offering, launching the RA’s Coby range of premium wines and investing about £5million in new vine plantings. Chapel Down’s RA’s Coby Corner de Cuvée sparkling wine reaches at 4300 – it was temporarily England’s most expensive wine, until being trumped by Nyetimber last year. And in five more years, Chapel Down anticipates having 950 acres of vineyard including those that are leased as well as those it owns outright in production, from which it can expect to harvest enough grapes to make about 2.5million bottles of wine in an average year.



These big changes reflect the leaps forward being made in both quality and quantity across English wine as a whole. English sparkling wine is now recognised – even by the French – as world class, and the industry is growing. 2.7million vines were planted across 2017 and 2018. Sales increased by 38 per cent from 2015 to 2017 and when the final figures come in, last year’s harvest will – quite comfortably – be the biggest on record. Clearly Brexit presents an enormous challenge – the current rate of growth depends on export and therefore on good trade deals, producers also buy a lot of equipment, from plant material to winery presses and tanks, from overseas, much of it from Europe.

The area of expansion is more of a sideways move – diversification. “Twenty years ago, things were very quiet. If you were a winemaker you were a winemaker – why would you even think about anything else?” says Mark Harvey, the managing director of wine at Chapel Down. “Now, one category is very much in vogue, whether you’re ageing beer in bourbon barrels or making gin from grape skins. Look around and you see wine producers turning their hand to all manner of other drinks.” It exemplifies the spirit of innovation among English and Welsh winemakers, says Julia Trustram Eve of Wine UK. They’re making vermouths – the key ingredient in the still-fashionable negroni. They’re distilling spirits – gin and vodka are most popular because they require no ageing, but some are making brandy too. And they’re brewing beers and ciders. Chapel Down makes wine among the best fields of Kent, but the move into beer was born more of pragmatism than of a romantic connection with the land. Chapel Down CEO Fraser Thompson, previously global brand director for

What’s next for English wine? Something’s brewing...

Ambitious British vineyards are diversifying into beer, spirits – and tourism. Victoria Moore reports

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

mission

TROIKA MISSION group

FOOD & DRINK



the up and coming area behind Kings Cross, close to Central Saint Martins, it has a small still, a restaurant, a cocktail bar and a terrace over the canal.

Which brings me to another subject: the trend for English wineries to be more outward-looking, integrating the drink into a lifestyle rather than selling it as a product. "Tourism is the logical way to extend a brand," says Thompson. "It's about more than just taking £15 off people to go on a tour - it's about giving people a special experience so that they go away and spread the message [about your wine]."



Thus English wine increasingly comes not just with a label design and a tasting note, but with an exhortation to visit its bar, or restaurant, or just to visit its "home" to share in the winemaking experience. Rathfinny Estate in Sussex is the perfect example of a producer that built this into its plans, offering wildlife walks, places to stay, dinners with guest chefs and a cellar door experience even before it had released its first sparkling wine.

The impact of the royal wedding was huge. We just couldn't answer the phones in time.

Needless to say, Chapel Down is hoping to attract some of the 70,000 visitors to its winery over to its brewery too, and is building a 130-seater restaurant and planning tasting tours to accommodate them. There is one thing missing, though. When English wine producers diversify, what ties everything together is the land and local flora. You make a wine, you use locally grown grapes. Make a gin or a vermouth, you use local botanicals to flavour it. You make a beer? Surely you need to use local hops? "We don't yet..." says Anderson, "but from this year all the malt will be locally sourced, and I'm on my way now to meet a local hop supplier so we can look at all the options..." Watch this space.

→ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Heineken, had the idea of making a Chapel Down beer as early as 2005. "We had a big fire the previous year and lost a lot of stock and needed to be able to pay the staff - so we brewed a beer," he says. It wasn't until 2011 when word got out that Chapel Down had been served at the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge that Thompson thought about doing it again, and incorporating beer into a serious business plan. This time the motive was mainly that Chapel Down didn't have enough wine to sell.

"The impact of the royal wedding was huge. We just couldn't answer the phones in time and this exacerbated the problem we had with the fact that while 2011 was a lovely harvest in terms of quality, the quantity was quite poor. Given we were looking ahead to the London Olympics the next year that was pretty frustrating. We needed to plant more vines, so we also needed to raise money, and the best way of doing that was to create a business that was cash-flow positive." Thus Curious Brewery was born, and it now offers a distinctly upmarket range of beers and ciders (see further details, right).

Making spirits is arguably the most logical move for winemakers: the Italians have long made grappa by distilling the pomace (leftover grape skins, seeds, stalks and pulp) from the wine press. Now several English producers, including Rathfinny Estate and Bolney Estate, as well as Chapel Down, have found ways to transform grape matter that would otherwise go to compost into that most beloved of English spirits - gin (and vodka and brandy).

Chapel Down recently went one stage further, opening the Gin Works, a bar designed to showcase its new spirits. In



AMBITIOUS STRATEGY
 The design of the new Curious Brewery, left; top left, Chapel Down's vines; a display at Chapel Down's Gin Works, above left

WE'RE (NOT) ONLY HERE FOR THE BEER

"There is a synergy between the beer and the wine because we use winemaking methods and ingredients such as yeasts to make the beers," says Thompson of Chapel Down. The vineyard's beer and cider arm might not (yet) use local hops to give the beers a direct connection with the land, but the cider is made with Kent apples. Curious Brewery produces Curious

Brew (a lager fermented with champagne yeast); Session IPA, made (the wine connection is extremely tenuous here) using three hops which is apparently "a homage to the power of three [grapes] used to create Bordeaux, Champagne and Cotes du Rhone wines") and Curious Apple (a 5.2% cider made from Rubens and Bramley apples grown in Kent and fermented with wine yeasts).

There are also limited edition small-batch beers such as Curiouser and



mission

TROIKA MISSION group

BE STILL MY HEARTY
 Bartender Omar Hassan shows off the hardware at Gin Work



Don't miss our weekly Food & Drink newsletter
www.telegraph.com/foodanddrink

- as well as running a thriving wedding business and making liqueurs. But Curious does seem to have the most aggressive growth plan: "We're now making about 25,000 hectolitres a year, with sales growing at 40-50 per cent a year and the brewery will have a capacity of 100,000 hectolitres a year," says Anderson.

ONE TO TRY CHAPEL DOWN CURIOUS SESSION IPA (4-8%, chapeldown.com, £48.50 for a case of 24 x 33cl bottles)
 A very light IPA, bright and clean with citrusy edges filled out by the gentle rounded taste of roasted malt with mild hints of caramel.

FAR FROM REBÛCHE WINE MAKERS GET SPIRITED

"When did we decide to make a gin?" says Sarah Driver of Rathfinny Estate. "When someone asked us to sell them our rebÛche to make gin so we thought, 'Well, we'll do it!'"
 The rebÛche is not "the rubbish" as some people mishear, but the name given in Champagne to the third and final pressing of the grape pulp, skins, stems and seeds. It's not legal in Champagne to use the rebÛche for wine production so it's usually sent for distillation.
 Other regions are differently regulated, and in England you can do as you please, but for quality reasons some

winemakers prefer to set aside the juice from this more astringent final pressing. Rathfinny now distils its rebÛche and uses it to make spirits. It has a couple of barrels of brandy, but most goes into a gin called Seven Sisters. Production is small: there were just 4,000 bottles in 2017 and 10,000 bottles in 2018.
 For some winemakers, such as Sam Linter at Bolney Estate in Sussex, it's the sustainability ethos - the prospect of repurposing some of the by-products from the winemaking process - that spurs them to action.
 Together with James Oag-Cooper, Linter set up Foxhole Spirits because she hated to see all the grape pulp go on to the compost. Now Bolney Estate's grape waste is used to make the very smooth Foxhole Gin. Lyme Bay and

It's about more than just going on a £15 tour - it's about giving people a special experience

Chapel Down are two other English wineries also making gin on the side, while High Clendon makes an eau de vie du vin liqueur.

ONE TO TRY CHAPEL DOWN CHARDONNAY VODKA (40%, chapeldown.com, £52)
 Chapel Down produces two spirits - a gin distilled from the bacchus pomace, and this vodka, which is distilled from the pulp, seeds and skin of chardonnay grapes left in the press once the wine has been made. It has quite a smooth, creamy and viscous feel in the mouth - more like a wheat than a rye vodka (in fact it reminds me slightly of Russian Standard).

THINGS CAN ONLY GET BITTER THE RISE OF ENGLISH VERMOUTH

The past decade or so has seen a big resurgence in vermouth. The base ingredient in vermouth is wine that has been fortified with spirit, but the drink has something in common with that other hugely popular drink of our times, gin, in that its main feature is botanicals.
 Vermouths are perfumed with a complex - and usually secret - mixture of roots (such as gentian or angelica) that bring bitterness, highly fragrant barks (such as cinnamon or cinchona); fruits (citrus); flowers (such as saffron); seeds (such as cardamom and coriander); and herbs (sage, rosemary, thyme).

Boutique vermouths have become hugely popular in bars because they can add different layers and seasonings to a cocktail, and bartenders often make their own. Of course they are also used in that highly fashionable cocktail, the negroni, which is made using equal parts of gin, Campari and red vermouth.
 It's also a natural move for English winemakers who can experiment with local botanicals to create something truly tied to the place in which it's made. Bolney Estate makes a rosso vermouth using sloes and elderberries that grow around the wine estate, while Albourne Estate, also in Sussex, makes a white vermouth using 40 different botanicals.

ONE TO TRY ALBOURNE ESTATE 40 VERMOUTH (18%, albourneestate.co.uk, £20)
 An utterly delicious, delicate and fragrant semi-sweet white vermouth made by Alison Nightingale using the produce from her 37-acre Sussex estate. This vermouth has a delicate floral scent that sings of summer, and as the name suggests, it's made using 40 botanicals, including English countryside classics such as rose petals, thyme and camomile as well as saffron, cardamom and tea. Good enough to drink on its own on the rocks, or try it with a delicate tonic such as Fever-Tree Light. It's also delicious, as Albourne suggests, made into a spritz using English sparkling wine or mixed with elderflower pressé, gin and bitters.



FIVE ENGLISH WINES TO TRY NOW

KIT'S COTY CHARDONNAY 2016 (12.5%, chapeldown.com, £30)

Kit's Coty is a single vineyard, on south-facing chalk slopes on the North Downs of Kent, planted by Chapel Down in 2007. This is the fourth and best release of this wine - an impressive, subtly oaked chardonnay, the best that England has yet produced. It has great restraint and poise. Waitrose has the excellent Chapel Down Brut NV and the Chapel Down Plant Dry on offer this month.



HARROW & HOPE BRUT RESERVE NV (12%, Lalthuwaite.com, £26.50)

From one of England's newer wine producers, set up by Henry Lalthuwaite, son of Tony and Barbara of the eponymous wine mail-order business. Lalthuwaite junior was being carted around vineyards while still in nappies, and worked as a winemaker in Australia and Bordeaux before striking out on his own. The wine is excellent - made from pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay, it is toasty and clean and very moresish.



LYME BAY PINOT NOIR ROSÉ 2017 (11%, *Great Western Wines of Bath*, £16.95)

The winemakers at Lyme Bay in Devon look after a whole range of Lyme Bay branded meads, fruit liqueurs and cream liqueurs as well as a spiced rum inspired by the West Country's smuggling history. Its Salted Caramel Cream Liqueur (£15.50 for 50cl at lymebaywinery.co.uk) is irresistible, but the winery is also very good at still wines made from grapes - this wild-strawberry-ish rosé is a real triumph.



NYETIMBER SPARKLING ROSE BRUT NV (12%, *Waitrose*, £29.99 down from £39.99 until 19 March)

Nyetimber is one of England's flagship wine producers, making consistently world-class sparkling wine. It might feel a little boring to recommend it - again - but the offer makes it worth flagging. Don't be put off by the somewhat downmarket new livery - the liquid inside the bottle is just as good as ever - a very sophisticated fragrant, fresh, red berry-scented sparkling rosé. Delicious.



WISTON ESTATE ROSÉ BRUT SPARKLING NV (12%, *Waitrose*, £28; wistonestate.com, £26.50)

One thing that's become clear is that what England does very well is sparkling rosé. Who'd have thought it? There are so many good ones, and Wiston's tight, energetic style is particularly good. Wiston produces a vintage as well as a non-vintage sparkling rosé. This is the cheaper non-vintage version and it's a beauty - lively and berry-scented.



mission

TROIKA MISSION group