

RATHFINNY



FIRST OF 700,000 VINES GO INTO THE GROUND AT ENGLAND'S NEWEST AND LARGEST VINEYARD

- **Rathfinny Estate will produce 1 million bottles of sparkling wine a year**
- **30 full time and 200 seasonal jobs to be created**

Embargoed until 00.01 26 March 2012

East Sussex today witnessed the birth of England's largest vineyard.

The first 50 acres of vines, which will contribute to the eventual production of over 1 million bottles of high quality sparkling wine a year, will be planted this week at Rathfinny Estate, a new 400 acre vineyard.

Rathfinny will be one of the largest single site vineyards in Europe and aims to capitalise on the booming demand – both nationally and internationally – for high quality English sparkling wine.

Four different grapes – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Riesling – will be planted this week. Rathfinny will plant roughly 50 acres of grapes per year until 2020, when the full 400 acres will be under vine.

The first still wine could appear as early as next year, with sparkling hitting the shelves in 2016 or 2017.

Mark Driver, founder and owner of Rathfinny, said: "We will produce small amounts of still wine, but this is going to be a predominately sparkling wine vineyard. High quality Sussex sparkling wine requires at least three years of bottle fermentation, so everyone will have to be patient while they wait!"

He added: "This week marks the start of a journey for us to create a sparkling wine to rival the best on offer from across the channel.

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

East Sussex has almost identical soil to the Champagne region and increasingly enjoys a very similar climate.

The location of the vineyard is on a south facing slope, just a few miles from the south coast and sheltered from south-westerly winds by a ridge that runs parallel to the vineyard.

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 will employ about 30 full time staff and over 200 seasonal staff once the whole Estate has been planted. A state-of-the-art winery will be completed by the summer of 2013. A staff hostel is also being built to accommodate seasonal workers, who will be needed during harvest and during the winter to maintain the vines. The hostel, which uses reclaimed old flint barns, is due to be completed in time for the winter of next year.

Rathfinny has hired Jonathan Médard, a renowned French winemaker, who has 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.

Working with Natural England and the National Trust, a programme of improvements is being made to enhance the local natural habitat while reviving and reclaiming the natural chalk grass downland and creating wildlife corridors to improve biodiversity. A new walk, the Rathfinny Trail, is being established, allowing the public access to parts of the Estate.

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 is being 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 removed calcium and microbes. The waste water used within the wine making process will be treated on site 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.

Rathfinny is also funding the construction of a new Wine Research Centre at Plumpton College, part of Brighton University, to support the development of skills that the English wine industry will require as it grows.

Mr 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 fulfill its potential.



ENDS

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, please see separate media pack.

Andrew Murray-Watson
Mission PR

Tel: +44 (0)20 7845 7800

Mob: +44 (0)7515 695 232

Email: rathfinny@thisismission.com

