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English wines come of age in 2011 according to Britain's oldest wine retailer

Berry Bros. & Rudd reports record year for native vintages as wine-makers hit the right notes

English wines had a record year in retail with sales up 50% by value and 25% by volume on 2010, while the value of English wine sold more than doubled between 2006 and 2011, according to Berry Bros. & Rudd, the 300 year old wine merchants. Berry's sales rose on the back of dramatically improved quality which has driven greater demand from drinkers for native grapes. Berry's selection now numbers 18 different English wines from seven different producers.

The Berry's findings come at the end of a good 2011 for English wine-makers. In August, Nielsen said the value sales of British wine rose to £26m (a value 45% higher than in 2010), while volumes also rose – up by 30% in 2011 compared to 2010. The numbers suggest that the quality of English wines has improved dramatically and that makers can command higher prices for the wines they are producing.

This year's English & Welsh Wine of the Year Competition awarded more medals than ever, with 90% of the 274 wines from 78 vineyards gaining medals – the highest number of entries ever in the competition.

Simon Field MW, English Wines Buyer at Berry Bros. & Rudd said:

“English wines finally broke their ‘vicious cycle’ in 2011. Makers are creating far higher quality wines, which has meant that retailers can put more English wine on their shelves and that consumers have a better and wider choice of wines available – and with stronger sales, there is more for makers to invest. The cycle has become a virtuous one this year and we expect that to continue.

“The trick for English makers over the coming years, however, will be to make their wines a bit more attainable when it comes to pricing. That should result from higher volumes and stronger sales, but the truth remains that, while they compare favourably with wines from across the world, English wines remain a premium product and, if they are to break into mainstream and gain a bigger following, producers will need to find ways of bringing prices at the checkout down.”

A number of vineyards have been added to the Berry's selection by Simon Field. This includes Ridgeview Estate, whose Grosvenor Blanc de Blancs has won multiple awards. Field also believes that Nyetimber, despite, or maybe because of, its burgeoning size, remains the one to watch. Particularly because 2012 will see the first wines made by talented Cherie Spriggs come to market.

Field concludes:

“There is increasing depth and breadth in English wines that has been developing over the past three years and really came to fruition in 2011. We found great wines being made across the South – from Cornwall to Kent – and there are new makers starting to produce wines of real quality. We expect that there will be new wines and new makers added to our selection in the coming 12 months and that English wine will continue to go from strength to strength. English sparkling wines are now seen as amongst the best in the world, and often beat Champagnes in blind tastings. However, English white wines are just getting better and better.”

For those keen to experience English wines at their best, Berry's English wines buyer Simon Field MW recommends:

1. 2004 Chapel Down, Pinot Reserve Brut, Kent, £23.95

A most impressive English sparkler, made in the traditional Méthode Champenoise by Owen Elias and his team at Chapel Down. Biscuity notes from the autolysis are finely integrated with the red fruit from the Pinots (Noir and Blanc) and the ensemble is rounded and long. Nyetimber beware ... there is now strong competition in the increasingly impressive English sparkling wine portfolio.

2. 2008 Grosvenor Blanc de Blancs, Ridgeview Estate, Sussex, £25.95

The Grosvenor marries citric with tropical fruit on the nose, and has gentle flavours, which put one in mind of entering a Pâtisserie on a Spring day. Refreshing and with fine and dignified bubbles, the 2008 is a very impressive effort and a worthy successor to the award winning 2007.

3. 2010 Wickham Vineyards Vintage Selection Dry White, Hampshire, £10.75

Winemaker William Maitland Biddulph has skillfully retained a stone-fruit purity with this wine. Its sense of place and refreshing transparency both inviting a gentle frisson of patriotic pride. Chalky, floral aromas and whiffs of newly-mown grass characterize this cool, classic Hampshire white, pleasingly reminiscent of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc but with an extra dose of the finest English reserve wine.

4. Jenkyn Place Brut, Hampshire, £24.95

Jenkyn Place Brut is an English Sparkling wine made from predominantly chardonnay, with 25% pinot noir and 15% pinot meunier and vinified by Ridgeview's multi-award winning team. An appealing aroma with good intensity and an engaging middle palate, showing richness from the chardonnay and perfume from the pinots. A worthy challenger to Champagne, but still uniquely English and especially-marked by a light minerality.

5. 2001 Nyetimber Première Cuvée Blanc de Blancs, Sussex, £32.95

The Chardonnay Cuvée is relatively rare, and although the ageing regime is as for the Classic Cuvée, the style differs, with an emphasis on elegance above all, its rich buttery fruit finely entwined with a fine minerality, its texture long and satisfying, worthy of comparison with some of the better Blancs de Blancs from Champagne itself.

ENDS

Contact

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Simon Field MW, English Wines Buyer at BB&R

Simon joined Berrys in 1998, having spent several misguided but lucrative years working as a Chartered Accountant in the City. His passion for opera and travel is well suited to buying trips down the Rhine and into the darker recesses of Andalucia. In addition to buying the Spanish and fortified ranges, Simon is also responsible for purchasing wines from South America and England. His three favourite areas of responsibility, however, are the Rhône Valley, Languedoc and Champagne. He gained his Master of Wine qualification in October 2002.

About Berry Bros. & Rudd

Over 310 years ago, Berry Bros. & Rudd opened its shop at 3 St James's Street, opposite St James's Palace, where it still stands today. Berry's now has shops in Hong Kong and Basingstoke, as well as a business in Japan and duty free presence in Dubai.

Berry's range comprises over 3,000 wines and services include The Wine Club, The Cellar Plan, Fine & Rare Wine Advice, comprehensive Wine Tastings, Fine Dining and Wine School. The cellars and Pickering Place at Berry's are available for corporate entertaining, cocktail parties and wine tastings. Berry's award-winning website www.bbr.com is a one-stop shop online and includes expert advice from Berry's own wine advisors.

For further discussion on this and other topics with Berry's experts please visit Berry's Wine Blog. To keep up-to-date with the latest wine news from Berry's as it happens, follow [@berrybrosrudd](https://twitter.com/berrybrosrudd) on Twitter. It only takes a few seconds and it's free. Become a fan of Berry Bros. & Rudd on Facebook at www.facebook.com/berryswine.