



Goosemark in Kent

FINE ESTATE

TEXT: Rajiv & Ritu Singhal • PHOTOS: Gusbourne Estate

Set in the picturesque landscape of Kent, the Garden of England, Gusbourne Estate strongly believes that the only way to ensure the quality of the grapes is to grow the grapes themselves. They are among the few wine companies in England to use own fruit only from their own vineyards in Kent and Sussex to produce quality English sparkling wines that is focussed at the luxury end of the market.



not a winemaker, he's not a wine grower – he's a wine drinker with a love for vintage champagne, a love for fine champagne.

The first vines of the traditional grape varieties in champagne – chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier – were planted on a farm that was Andrew's 'turnip patch' – where turnips along with maize and rapeseed were growing. With vineyard manager, Jon Pollard, more plots in Kent have been consolidated and new ones in West Sussex have been added to total 231 acres of vineyards.

Maybe Andrew was attracted by the unique history and geology of this estate. Only about 6 miles from the coast, the vineyards have been planted on the edge of the reclaimed Romney Marsh (somewhat better known for the long woolly breed of Salt Marsh sheep that are reared here and the smugglers of yesteryear). The southern boundaries are defined by the Royal Military Canal, that was built to deter Napoleon – and the smugglers. In the 17th century, some of the estate would've been under the sea because the soil is a mostly mix of clay, marsh and sea deposits while near the marsh it's sandy.

Several distinct vineyards – Cherry Garden, Boot Hill, Bottom camp – are part of the estate in Appledore. All vines are planted in the south east on south-facing slopes. The plantings are low lying in relation

In 2010, the debut vintages of the Gusbourne Brut Reserve 2006 and the Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs 2006 were released to critical acclaim that managed to change the international reputation of English wines. Curiosity leads us to locate the village of Appledore in Ashford on our navigator:

The geographical co-ordinates of Gusbourne Estates, 51° 2' 49" N and 0° 47' 51" E, greet us at 'The Nest' (the home of the geese). Dan Grainger, the cellar door manager, takes charge of our visit. The award-winning Cellar Door was built in 2017 – not so much to push sales but to build and nurture Brand Ambassadors. An architectural delight, the wood panelled area houses an interesting collection of memorabilia and information about Gusbourne and its Estate. A centre-piece staircase leads to the tasting room upstairs that overlooks the vineyards. A wall has been designed with empty bottles of sparkling wine. A true feast for senses.

The wine story may only be a decade and half old, but the history of the estate can be traced back to the year 1410. Goosebourne Estate was the largest estate in the village of Appledore in Ashford – about 69 miles south east of London – owned by John de Goosebourne, whose family crest of three geese still hangs in the local parish church.

Dr Andrew Weeber, a South African orthopaedic surgeon, acquired the majestic estate in 2004 and set himself on a mission "to produce the finest sparkling wine in the world, not just in England." Andrew's







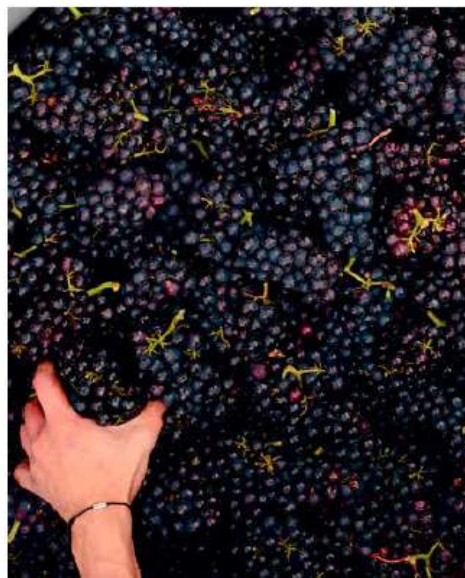
to the sea level and retain natural warmth. The vines in the Bottom Camp vineyard near the Royal Military Canal are younger (planted between 2013 and 2015).

Plantings in clay benefit from water retention. Density is very low – around 1600 vines per acre – and double guyot is in place so that each plant has a chance to get sun exposure. The grid is 2.5 metres between the rows and 1 metre in the row. The vine head is high – almost at waist height.

The maritime weather adds to the estate's complex terroir. Uninterrupted sea winds dry the fruit, prevent the skin from thickening, help maintain the flavour profile, and bring salinity to the grapes. Sun exposure helps ripen the fruit and prevent rot. Air circulation prevents frost, but Gusbourne still invested in frost drains (flat horizontal fans) as a precaution.

Gusbourne favours minimal intervention, "we believe that the only way to ensure the quality of our grapes is to grow them ourselves." Only the finest grapes are hand-picked in the vineyards. The experienced local team has been repeating this exercise year-on-year. In accordance with self-imposed strict parameters, Gusbourne green harvests (or drops) some amount of fruit in the latter part of the growing season. Whilst this reduces the potential overall yield, it enables the vines to enhance the ripening of their remaining clusters. "It is not a question of how much we produce but the quality of what we produce."

Charlie Holland is the winemaker since 2013. His philosophy is prominently 'etched' at the Cellar Door. "At Gusbourne, we embrace



tradition but readily challenge convention, even to make what might seem like very small differences to the finished wine, attention to detail is often the difference between great and exceptional."

Charlie trained at Plumpton Wine College in Brighton where he learnt how to handle cool climate grapes and make them into wine. With his winemaking team, Charlie has "built a clear understanding of the flavour profile of grapes from every corner of the vineyards and how these are affected by the variations of the climate in any particular growing season." And since 45 different clones are in the mix, Charlie spends as much time in the vineyards as he does crafting his wines in the winery.

Whole bunches are harvested within an hour of harvest at the press house. Between 5% and 55% are pressed for their *cuvées*. The *taillies* are used only to make *Ratafia* – a liqueur that is flavoured with almonds, peaches, apricots, or cherries. 700 litres are pressed from 1000 kilogram of grape and ferment in thermo-regulated stainless steel tanks with a small portion appropriated to ferment in French oak barrels (from Bourgogne, Bordeaux and Champagne) to give a little bit of toast in the back palate.

Tastings can involve more than 150 base wines over two or more weeks and several times. At least 15 base wines make the core range of



sparkling wine. Nothing is left to chance at Gusbourne – it is important that the characteristic style of the entire range is maintained.

In old chalk mines in Wiltshire, the wines age on lees in the black green bottles for a prolonged period of twenty-eight months. Dosage is usually between 7 to 9 grams per litre to enhance the richness of the wine, but vinification experiments are in trial with lows of 4 grams and highs of 11 grams. After disgorgement and finishing at the Estate, they come back to the cellars for a 'resting' period of 6 to 9 months. Bumping the roads doesn't seem to have any adverse impact on the wines. Labelling is done manually, and can be a bit of a task, but this keeps with the philosophy of minimal automation at Gusbourne.

Gusbourne's approach is to age its sparkling wines for as long as is necessary and as a result, the average production cycle is four years from harvest to sale. In recent years, wonderfully ripe grapes, with optimum levels of natural sugar and acidity across all three varieties – chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier have been available in record yields and the resulting wine production buffers the inventory to safe levels.

Like only a few other producers in the growing English wine industry, Gusbourne make wines from single estates and wines from single vintages but no non-vintage wines at all – this is against the recent



trend in the industry to create the easy-going non-vintage wines for the consumers. "We consider our wines to be a little more gastronomic. We manage to make complex and rich wines, with a touch of oak, malolactic fermentation and extensive ageing," says Dan.

"Each and every bottle of wine crafted at Gusbourne carries a contemporary goose crest in honour of our heritage – the 'Goosemark' is a symbol of trust, representing our pursuit of uncompromising quality."

The flagship Gusbourne Blanc de Blancs draws from hand selected Chardonnay and rests for a minimum of forty-two months on lees and six months on cork before it is deemed ready for release. Charlie believes that it is the truest expression of terroir. A crowning moment has been the choice by Buckingham Palace and the selection for the opening party at the 2012 London Olympics. Gusbourne Brut Reserve 2015 Limited Edition is what British Airways first class passengers enjoy at thirty something thousand feet.

Gusbourne presents a perfect blend of traditional values and modernity to its audiences, wherever in the world they may be. And they hope that one day Her Majesty's Treasury will recognise that Gusbourne sparkling shouldn't pay the same taxes as Champagne or Tasmanian bubbly – and reward their efforts. ✨



TASTING NOTES



TWENTY FOURTEEN BRUT RESERVE

Varietal: 60% Pinot Noir, 22% Chardonnay, 18% Pinot Meunier.

Appearance: Golden.

Nose: Very aromatic. Citrus, honey, brioche.

Palate: Abundant red fruit – apples and berries – with notes of fresh bread.

Finish: Long, full, rounded.

Alcohol: 12%

Dosage: 8g/l.

Inside Information: The “winery wine” has more of a consistent style. Overall, a dry year with rain in August. Vintage could be completed by 7th October. Whole bunch pressing and a 24-36 hour natural settling. 100% malolactic fermentation. Some small portion of the wine is fermented in old oak barrels for complexity. Minimum ageing on lees is 36 months.



TWENTY THIRTEEN BLANC DE BLANCS

Varietal: 100% Chardonnay

Appearance: Pale gold

Nose: Citrus, green apple, buttered toast, jaggery.

Palate: Vibrant acidity, traces of salinity, grapefruit, sharp flavours.

Finish: Creamy, elongated acidity, zesty backbone.

Alcohol: 12%

Dosage: 9g/l

Inside Information: Rather picky about the ripeness of the fruit, harvest was completed reasonably late in this vintage. Whole bunch pressing and a 24-36 hour natural settling. Used the best selection and a lot of the Cœur de Cuvée. 100% malolactic fermentation. Some small portion of the wine is fermented in new oak barrels to add a little structure. Minimum ageing on lees is 28 months.



TWENTY FIFTEEN ROSÉ

Varietal: 54% Pinot Noir, 32% Pinot Meunier, 14% Chardonnay.

Appearance: Delicate pink

Nose: Cherry, wild strawberry, cranberry, fresh pastry.

Palate: Fresh, very fruity, citrusy.

Finish: Lingering, consistent, rounded.

Alcohol: 12%

Dosage: 7.5g/l

Inside Information: Whole bunch pressing and a 24 hour natural settling. 100% malolactic fermentation. Barrel-aged pinot noir wine derived from the Burgundian clone is blended in a small fraction prior to the secondary fermentation. Minimum ageing on lees is 26 months. A very finely made wine that reflects a strong English character – it is very highly demanded.



TWENTY FOURTEEN GUINEVERE

Varietal: 100% Chardonnay

Appearance: Pale yellow

Nose: Captivating. Buttery, citrusy.

Palate: Balanced. Green apple, greengages (wild Kentish natural plum).

Finish: Broad. Classic barrel fermented cool climate Chardonnay.

Alcohol: 12%

Clones: 548/ 95

Inside Information: This wine that takes the name of the founder's daughter, Genevieve, has an exaggerated Burgundy character crafted with care at Gusbourne. Concentration was increased by dropping 50% fruit on the clones in August. Fully destemmed and crushed. 100% malolactic fermentation and some bâtonnage. Fermentation at cellar temperature and ageing in French oak, mostly old and some new, for six months.



Twenty Sixteen PINOT NOIR

Varietal: 100% Pinot Noir

Appearance: Violet

Nose: Ripe strawberry, cherry, roasted coffee.

Palate: Raspberry, cranberry flavours with gamey and smokey notes.

Finish: Rich, full, consistent. Soft, supple tannins.

Alcohol: 12%

Clones: 777/ 828

Inside Information: Concentration and flavour was increased by dropping 50% fruit on the clones in early August. Fully destemmed and crushed after a 3 day cold soak. 100% malolactic fermentation. Fermented on skins at 20°C for two weeks in inox tanks and ageing in French oak, mostly old and some new, for six months.