

The English do their best to make bacchus divine



Will Lyons

The great English wine boom of the 21st century continues at a blistering pace. Glorious weather last summer enabled the 522 commercial vineyards in England and Wales to produce 15.6m bottles, up from 6.3m in 2014.

Leading the way is sparkling wine, of course, with estates such as Nyetimber, Gusbourne, Hambledon, Herbert Hall, Harrow & Hope, Wiston and many more delivering credible, in some cases world-class, examples. The next hurdle will be mastering still wine.

As well as chardonnay, bacchus — the fourth most planted grape variety on these shores — is beginning to gain traction. Introduced to Britain in 1973, it's an early-ripening grape, suited to our cooler climate. High in acidity, light-bodied and with relatively low alcohol, the best examples are

clean, with plenty of lively aromas such as elderflower, lime zest, tomato leaf and grapefruit.

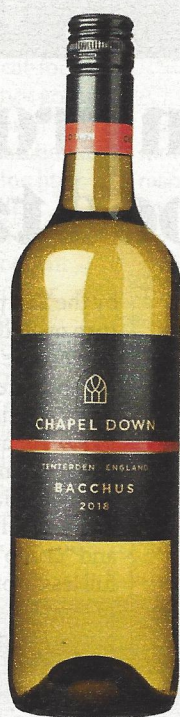
Bacchus has been described as the poor man's sauvignon blanc, quality is mixed and prices are high, but examples such as Kit's Coty from Chapel Down in Kent, Camel Valley in Cornwall and Flint Vineyard in Norfolk are impressive. They tend to be at their best when paired with seafood, whether it's oysters, crab or fish and chips, but they also go down well with a simple salad ■

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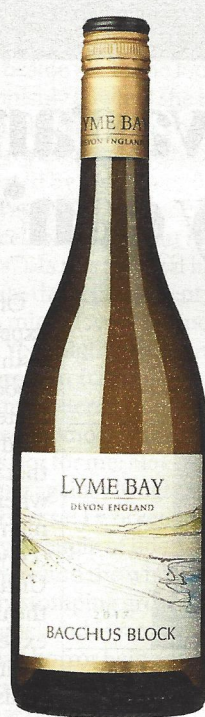
2018 DENBIES ENGLISH WHITE LILY MARKS & SPENCER, £10
Surrey
Produced by the Denbies estate near Dorking, this crowded blend contains Ortega, müller-thurgau, seyval blanc and bacchus. Lime and white fruit combine to yield a tangy bite on the finish.



2018 CHAPEL DOWN BACCHUS WAITROSE, £14
Kent
This wine has really convinced me of the potential of bacchus. Beautifully aromatic, with notes of melon, citrus and peach, it's high in acidity and has a refreshing, supple flavour. Serve chilled with prawns for a magical combination.



2018 TESCO FINEST ENGLISH WHITE TESCO, £12
Kent
This blend of pinot blanc, bacchus and chardonnay is produced by the Hush Heath estate. It has benefited from favourable growing conditions in 2018 and has traces of elderflower, peach and citrus, finishing dry and crisp.



2017 LYME BAY BACCHUS BLOCK HENNING'S WINE, £17.50
Devon
Lyme Bay is forging quite a reputation for its award-winning bacchus. Made from very ripe fruit, this is more full-bodied and smooth than many other examples. Pale in the glass, it brims with tropical fruit and fresh notes of spring herbs.



2018 SIMPSONS ESTATE CHARDONNAY WAITROSE, £14
Kent
New to the Waitrose range and launched last week, this is a 100% chardonnay from vines cultivated on the chalky North Downs of Kent. Clean and well textured, with subtle hints of pear and citrus, it finishes with a zesty saline tang.



2017 WOODCHESTER VALLEY BACCHUS FORTNUM & MASON, £15
Cotswolds
One of the most interesting English bacchus examples I've tasted. Produced in the Cotswolds, it has all you could wish for in this grape variety: gooseberry, elderflower and citrus aromas, with a bone-dry finish.