

The Cornish wine that is tickling drinkers' palates

The award-winning Camel Valley Vineyard is looking to increase its acreage of grapes for the second year running.

David Wilcock met up with co-owner Sam Lindo to find out the secret of its success

WHEN Bob and Anne Lindo decided they had had enough of scraping a living as sheep farmers at the end of the 1980s, they were only planning to grow grapes on five acres to see how it went.

Seventeen years since the first vines were laid at the Camel Valley Vineyard near Bodmin their walls are bedecked with honours and they are harvesting 20 acres of grapes per year from some 20,000 vines, to fill up 60,000 to 70,000 bottles of wine annually.

And they have recently decided to plant at least another ten acres this year.

So how have they managed to at least begin to change the scoffing attitude given to generations of English wine and start it being seen as a world player?

Their son Sam, who now co-runs the business, told how having a "new world" attitude to wine in what is a forgotten corner of the "old world" when it comes to wine, was the key to unlocking its success.

"The 'old world' countries like France are very steeped in traditional wine making," he said.

"English wines used to try to copy these other countries when we don't have the climate, and they did things to the wine which made it taste bad.

"When we started up people were making wine in new places and moving away from the idea of doing things in the old way. There was nothing to hold them back and it is like that with us.

"We took this on, so we are working with the delicate flavours that our grapes produce."

And it has been a success. Last year they took a gold medal at the International Wine Challenge, dubbed "the Oscars of the wine world" for their 2001 Cornwall Brut, the only gold medal won by a sparkling wine made outside the Champagne region.

This year they followed that up with a silver for their Pinot Noir Cornwall Brut Rosé, beating the best of the new world. Not bad for starting out to produce wine from five acres.

"Dad doesn't know why he planted them in the first place," Sam admitted.

"We were a sheep farm, so rather than break even doing that he decided to break even by doing something interesting. At least we'd have wine to drink."

Following on from the gold medal, the vineyard last year planted ten acres of



● **SWEET SUCCESS:** But Sam Lindo and the team at Camel Valley concentrate on dry wines, to widespread acclaim

vines, doubling vines under cultivation to the current 20 acres and doing the same to output. The new plants will add at least ten acres, but as with all vines, they will not be productive for three years.

But the operation is not one aiming, like many Australian labels, to appear on all supermarket shelves. Mr Lindo admitted they are a "niche market" operation looking to gain a reputation for excellence rather than ubiquity.

Rick Stein stocks them, as does the House of Commons. They were among English wines served up to French president and Anglophile Jacques Chirac at a state visit and during the UK's presidency of the European Union.

What may be a little more surprising is that half of all sales are still made from the vineyard shop, also the focal point for increasingly popular tasting tours.

While creating wines across the spectrum, the vineyard focuses on its sparkling, rosé and white wines, as they

are the best produced by the grapes grown. Bacchus, Seyval Blanc, Reichensteiner, Pinot Noir, Dornfelder, Rondo and Triumphe grapes can be found there, varieties more suited to a cooler climate like that of Cornwall compared to South Australia or South America.

"Our rosé can compete with the best in the world," Mr Lindo said.

"And with our sparkling wines, we have been successful because we have not tried to copy Champagne, we go for much more fruit and freshness. People seem to like it and we feel we now have a bit of respect from wine makers in the rest of the world."

And it appears they are not the only ones. The vineyard is getting telephone calls every week from people asking them for advice and tips on how to start their own wine production. It is advice they are happy to give, as they are keen to help the wider wine creating industry in the South West grow into a world player.