



WINE

Christine Austin takes a look at how you can witness the growth of a flourishing industry

Get a taste for English

SIMON BURT

ONE of the real treats about visiting a vineyard is the opportunity to stand glass in hand among the vines and see the slope of the land, the direction of the sun and realise just why a particular site can produce such enjoyable wine. You can see the soil, the drainage and the rows of trained vines, and understand the work that has gone into each sip of wine. Just a few years ago, you had to travel overseas to enjoy this kind of experience, but now with the English wine industry flourishing, you only have to jump in the car and head for your local vineyard.

English Wine Week starts on May 27, and within the country-wide celebration of English wine, the people at wineries in our region are organising a terrific range of activities, tours and tastings with the sole aim of sharing their vineyards and their wines with consumers.

The English Wine business has become established. No longer the preserve of retired colonels and eccentrics, it is a fully fledged farming business that assesses the land, grape varieties, winemaking and markets, long before the first vines are planted. Vineyards have grown to economic proportions and proper winemaking equipment has been installed. The results are obvious in the bottles.

I have judged the English and Welsh Wine of the Year Competition from time to time and the quality of the wines submitted has improved enormously over the years. Now these wines rank quite happily with wines from around the world.

The style of English wine varies from producer to producer and from region to region, but they all have a typical clean, delicate style, with flavours of apples, pears, citrus and elderflower, with enough flavour to balance the acidity. Grape varieties for the whites are not the usual Chardonnay and

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Sauvignon Blanc which are found across the world of wine, but delicate varieties such as Seyval Blanc, Bacchus, Reichensteiner and Schönburger, with Madeleine Angevine and even Gewurztraminer adding their characters to the range. These grapes are capable of ripening in our marginal climate, although if global warming continues, who knows what our vineyards will be able to grow? Reds can also be grown, including the ripe-tasting Dornfelder and even Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, if the conditions are right.

During English Wine Week, here are some of the events you can try.

Vineyards to visit

Yearlstone Vineyard near Tiverton is open every day between 11am and 6pm, free tastings this week. Call 01884 855700.

Down St Mary near Crediton is open every weekday between 10.30am and 5pm, Sunday 12.30am to 4.30pm. Free tastings available. Call 01363 82300.

Manstree Vineyard, Shillingford St George just outside Exeter is open from 9am to 6pm. It will be offering free tastings and launching a new wine from the 2005 vintage. Call 01392 832218.

Sharpham Vineyard, Ashsprington near Totnes is open every day between 10.30am and 5.30pm. Call 01803 732203.

Oakford Vineyard near Tiverton is open all week. Call 01398 351486 for opening times.

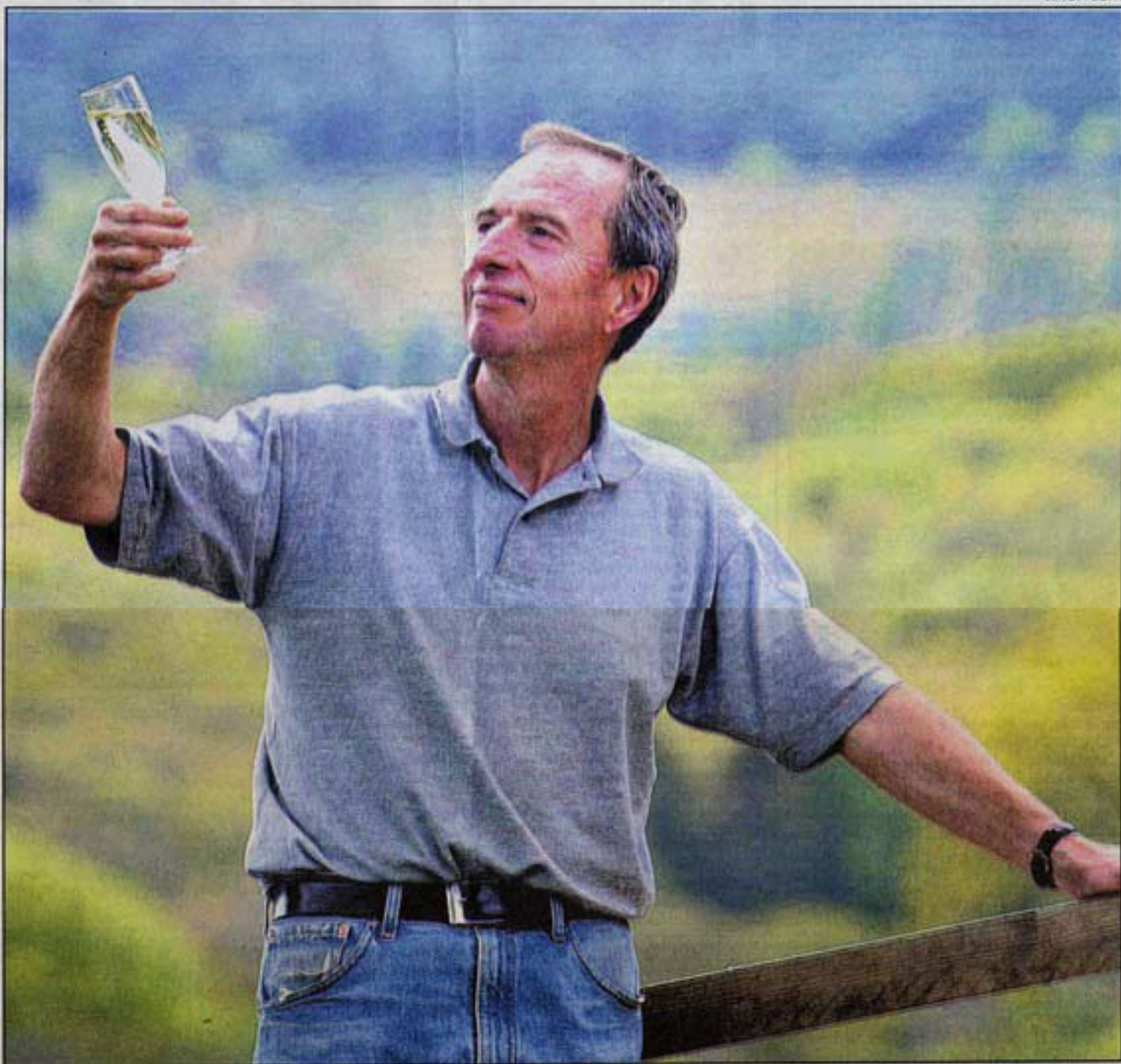
Garden Cottage Plant Centre and Vineyard at Coldridge from Wednesday to Sunday. Vineyard is open from 10am to 5pm. Call 01363 83575.

Camel Valley Vineyard near Bodmin, Cornwall, is open Monday to Saturday from 10am to 5pm, with a guided tour at 2.30pm, Monday to Friday only, at £4.50 to include a free glass of wine on the sun terrace. Call 01208 77959.

Special events

Saturday, May 27

Down St Mary wines will be available to taste at Hotel Barcelona, Magdalen Street, Exeter, at lunchtime and dinner. Call 01363 82300 for more information.



● **READY AND WAITING:** Bob Lindo of Camel Valley Vineyard prepares to welcome visitors in English Wine Week

Yearlstone Vineyards in Bickleigh is the venue for Music and Mezes while sipping a glass or two on the Vineyard View terrace in the beautiful Exe Valley. A classical guitarist will play while you enjoy mezes and a glass of wine. Event starts at 6.30pm, cost is £17.50. Call 01884 855700.

Sunday, May 28

River Cruise on the Exe starting at the Topsham Cellars of Pebblebed Wines. Enjoy a tasting of all Pebblebed wines then take a bottle of your choice on the cruise for a special English Wines Week lunch at a riverside pub. Call 01392 875908.

Down St Mary Vineyard near Crediton offers guided tours at 11am and 2pm, price £3.50.

Higher Living Vineyard, Down St Mary offers vineyard tours and cream teas, price £3.50. Call 01363 84221.

Ashwell Vineyard near Bovey Tracey is open as is the garden in the National Gardens Scheme. Call 01626 8300031.

Monday, May 29

Manstree Vineyard, Shillingford St George just outside Exeter, starts its new self-guided tours. Call 01392 832218 for details.

Down St Mary Vineyard near Crediton offers guided tours at 11am and 2pm, £3.50. Call 01363 82300.

Tuesday, May 30

Learn how to grow grapes at Practical Vinegrowing demonstration at Yearlstone. Includes one-hour lecture, lunch and a glass of wine. Starts 11.30am, cost £12. To book, call 01884 855700.

Bob Lindo of Camel Valley Vineyards in Cornwall will offer a tasting at Rick Stein's deli in Padstow at midday.

Wednesday, May 31

Sharpham Vineyard the second largest in the South West is holding an open day with a guided tour at 3.30pm. Also available is the ultimate indulgence - Sharpham sparkling wine and Devon strawberries. Call 01803 732203.

Camel Valley Vineyard offers a Grand Tour to include a comprehensive tasting of the range, £6.50. Call 01208 77959.

Thursday, June 1

Willhayne and Highcroft vineyards near Axminster are open from 2-8pm. Both new vineyards, they are offering free tastings of 2005 wines. Call 01297 553463.

Yearlstone Vineyards has a guided tour at 4pm, cost £4. Call 01884 855700.

Camel Valley Vineyards near Bodmin will hold

a Cornish wine, bread and artisan cheese evening, to include a full tour of the vineyard and winery plus a comprehensive wine tasting with the winemaker followed by a luxurious Cornish artisan bread and cheese supper introduced by Truro cheesemonger Stephen Gunn. Cost £15 per person, or £28 a couple. To book, call 01208 77959.

Friday, June 2

Higher Living Vineyard at Down St Mary offers vineyard tours and cream teas from 2.30-4.30pm, price £3.50. Call 01363 84221.

Yearlstone Vineyards has a guided tour at 4pm, cost £4. Call 01884 855700.

Saturday June 3

Yearlstone Vineyards, Bickleigh offers another chance to enjoy Music and Mezes. A classical guitarist will play while you enjoy mezes and a glass of wine, starting at 6.30pm and costing £17.50. Call 01884 855700.

Higher Living Vineyard at Down St Mary offers vineyard tours and cream teas from 2.30-4.30pm, price £3.50. Call 01363 84221.

Old Walls Vineyards near Teignmouth is holding its first ever vineyard tours and tasting from 2pm. Call 01626 770877.