

English Wine Week starts tomorrow

23 May 2008 by Julia Harding MW

English Wine Week starts tomorrow. Saturday 24 May. English wine producers are organising various events to promote their wines, with far more vineyards than usual open to the public. (The photo shows harvest at Lambhurst in Kent.) Entertainment ranges from the more predictable vineyard walks and tastings to the less typical belly dancing at Dorney vineyard in Devon and Rick Stein's fish and chips at Camel Valley in Cornwall. For full details, and vineyard locations, see the [English Wine Week site](#).

English wines have also shown well in UK wine competitions this year, as Jancis writes [here](#).

To encourage you to take part, if only by opening a bottle or two, here are a few of the wines I tasted most highly at the English Wine Producers tasting in London last month. The sparkling wines were, as one might expect from that long-standing track record, some of the most successful offerings, but there were some pretty good still whites as well. I think that the biggest stumbling block for English producers is their understandable dependence on grape varieties specially bred to grow in the UK climate, such as Seyval Blanc, Phoenix, Reichensteiner, which can produce good but not, in my opinion and experience, great wines - though Bacchus can be aromatic and juicy and pretty successful. Even for the [winning whites](#).

...the brightest future (and present) seems to be for those made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Red varieties such as Robert, Regent and Triumph d'Alsace are even less likely to achieve greatness than the whites, though there are some vibrant and improving plantings of Pinot Noir. One red that stood out for its sweet bright fruit and good value was **Woolcombe Hills Pinot Noir Pinocco 2006** (the official name for Fitchburg in the UK), which sells for £8.95. The producer, near Shaftesbury Ave, also has a Pinot Noir but I list it was reared by ageing in American oak. (French barrels are apparently on their way for the next vintage.)

There were some attractive and refreshing rosés, both still and sparkling, but I particularly liked **Wickham's Celebration Rose 2007** (near Southampton), made from 100% Combladen, a red variety widely planted in Germany, and good value - in the context of English wine - at £6.99.

Only a number of English wines are made off-dry, the slight sweetness a good foil to sometimes very high acidity, but my favourite dry (or dry-tasting white) was **Camel Valley's Bacchus 2006** (Cornwall, £10.95), which was fresh and aromatic on the Sauvignon Blanc scale of flavours and showed some minerality but also robbable purity; **Chapel Down's Lambhurst Estate Bacchus Reserve 2006** (Kent, £12), crisp and a little empy and more powerful than the Camel Valley version; and **Wickham's Special Release Fumé 2007**, a tightly coiled, creamy-textured subtle blend of Bacchus and Reichensteiner.

Several wines were fine and far between but **Eggleston's North Star 2004** (Southampton, £18 for 27.5cl), a very sweet, late-picked, 100% Madeleine Angevine, was a nice way to round off the tasting. I'd have liked a little more balancing acidity but it's quite an achievement to bottle something like this for north that tastes like liquid sunshine.