

## Stopham Pinot Gris 2010 England

16 Feb 2012 by Jancis Robinson

From £12.66

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It's a pleasure to travel round the world and no longer have to apologise for the quality of English wine. For some time now I have defended our better sparkling wines quite robustly to any audience anywhere, but it has been more difficult to cite still English wines that stand up to international competition. They tend to be thin and tart - and occasionally poorly made (although I was impressed by the 2009 vintage of Biddenden Gamay that I made this [wine of the week](#) a couple of years ago.)

But **Stopham Pinot Gris 2010 England** seems to have come to the rescue of British wine writers everywhere. It really is a thoroughly respectable rendition of this grape variety, albeit with much more obvious acidity and less alcohol - a refreshing 11% - than any example I have encountered from Alsace. It does have the trademark relatively heady perfume and notable fruit however, tastes dry (thanks to the relatively high acidity), is as clean as a whistle, and would make a thoroughly satisfying aperitif or cooking wine - by which I mean a wine to drink while cooking.

This is the debut vintage from Simon Woodhead's Stopham Vineyard on a gentle sandy slope between Pulborough and Petworth in West Sussex in the South Downs National Park, pictured below.

Woodhead once worked for the McLaren F1 team but it was while subsequently teaching in Spain that he got the wine bug and decided to enrol as a student at Plumpton College near Brighton. According to the Stopham website, 'Simon used to design automotive sensors at TAG McLaren F1, but now the only sensor he is concerned about is the carbon dioxide sensor measuring the fermentation rates.' Indeed when I asked him to what he attributed the success of his 2010 he answered:

-The site is very sandy - Richard Smart said it was the sandiest site he has seen in England. Hence, it's very free draining [useful in such a damp climate - JR].

-Stopham has a warm microclimate and it is low altitude.

-All fermentations are conducted by automatically measuring the carbon dioxide emitted and adjusting the temperature to achieve a slow gentle *constant* rate of fermentation of four to six weeks - this is key I think in helping to preserve the delicate aromas characteristic of English wine. This is unique in England as no other wineries here have this system (yet).

-Inert gas sterile bottling with Stelvin Lux+ screwcap (this screwcap is unique in England)

He certainly seems to be on the right track and claims that the 2010 is not just down to first-vintage syndrome (whereby first vintages often shine, perhaps partly down to low initial yields). He is even more pleased by the as yet unfined and unbottled 2011 Pinot Gris whose flavours have been concentrated by a particularly poor flowering and resulting concentration. He is also reassured by his increased level of experience and by the good late season that finally ripened the grapes.

This is still such a small enterprise that Woodhead measures the vineyard by the number of vines planted (21,000) and its output of Pinot Gris by the number of bottles (4,000 in 2010). He spotted the slope while a student at Plumpton and is now a tenant farmer. Pinot Gris represents 40% of the plantings, Pinot Blanc 30%, Bacchus 10% and he also has some Dornfelder for rosé and the widely planted (in England) Pinot Noir and Chardonnay for fizz.

A barn on the estate was refitted as a winery in time for the 2010 vintage. While he is the head winemaker, he is assisted in the winery and vineyard by fellow Plumpton student Tom Bartlett and in the vineyard by harvest manager Kivlan O'Brien who, according to the website, 'has always been a top gardener in Hampstead'. Too top for me to have

encountered him alas. Very many congratulations to all of them anyway, and to Liberty Wine for having spotted the potential and taken on the agency.

They have already managed impressive distribution in the UK, as you can see from the link below.

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