

From Burgundy northwards 2012 is already being described as the worst vintage for two decades.

According to Champagne growers every possible disaster has hit the vines this cruel year and even as far south as Italy yields will be around half those in 2011.

Nor will the small amount of berries mean concentrated flavours – though the PR machines will tell you differently.

Here in England the rapid progress of the last few years will certainly be setback.

There will scarcely be any 2012 Devon wine – and it is certainly the worst vintage in the last 17 for us here at Yearlstone's three hectares.

Fortunately we have several thousand litres of 2011 still in tank. For once we did plan ahead and build a reserve. And our increasing concentration on our Vintage Brut range mean we have quite a cellar stock of slowly ageing Champagne-method sparkling wine from both 2009 and 2010. This is a good thing as demand for English sparkling wine is absolutely exploding. We have been selling out as fast as we can disgorge, and already have been forced to prioritise key customers. Being taken on board by the UK's top independent wine retailer has been a bit of a shock – keeping up with volumes demanded from them alone is going to be a challenge.

Here in Devon the wine trade has been increasingly enthusiastic – about Devon wine as a whole not just the Champagne-beating fizzes.

Just to take one example. The Clovelly Estate has been offering a Devon wine list to customers – and reporting that this summer Devon wines have been accounting for between 40 and 50 of ALL their wine sales. From seafood restaurants in Brixham to gastro pubs on Exmoor Devon wines have been proving a real hit. The big question is just how much wine prices will have to up next year after the 2012 washout – a question not only for the English producers, but for Champagne houses and most of France too. I suspect the answer will be : not much. Things are just too tight for price rises – no matter what the excuse. While English fizz sales have been rocketing, Champagne sales have been falling - by around 7% in 2012 so far.

But now wine recommendations.

My pick for this winter among English reds are : **Pebblebed 2011**. Amazingly complex and powerful from the ripest red grapes grown there so far (Pinot Noir and Rondo). A natural 12.5% alcohol this has the depth and body of reds from much further south.

A consistently good English red wine producer is **Kenton Estate** near Exeter, and Matthew's **Pinot Noir Precoce 2011** is a fine example. A bit further afield, if you can get hold of it, is Peter Biddlecombe's **Portesham Red 2010**, made by Yearlstone's winemaker Juliet White. Another silver medallist at the Wine of the Year this is a lovely example of English Rondo – again from very ripe red grapes. Of course very widely available is **Sharpham Estate's Dornfelder** – the 2011 red was released a month or two ago.

For a very English light red our own **Yearlstone Number 4 2011** has proved very popular.

At 12% natural alcohol this is a subtle balance of light English cherries and soft tannins.

These reds can be bought direct from the vineyards either in person or online. Yearlstone & Sharpham wines are available from many delis and wine merchants across Devon.

Portesham is only available direct from the vineyard, and Pebblebed & Kenton wines directly or from Darts Farm's wonderful wine shop at Topsham.

Yearlstone Vineyard's wines from YV, Bickleigh EX16 8RL. 01884 855700 or online www.yearlstone.co.uk. Also from Tantivys Dulverton, Winsford Stores, West Country Cheese & Wine Barnstaple, Johns of Appledore.

Sharpham Estate wines from Sharpham, Ashprington, Totnes or www.sharpham.com

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Pebblebed wines from www.pebblebed.co.uk or [Darts Farm](#)