

First off congratulations to the Clovelly Estate in North Devon. Since they became converts to Devon wine they have really led the way.

Their launch of a Devon Wine List last year has outrun all expectations, accounting for close to half of all wine sales in their pubs and hotels. Now Clovelly has been ranked the second most influential supporter of English wine – in a national wine newsletter. Well done Nigel at Clovelly – he tells me his plans in 2013 are to expand the Devon Wine List to 20 individual wines.

Devon has been leading the way in the English wine world for some years. The Devon Wine Week launched jointly by Yearlstone and English Wine Producers in 2006 has got Devon wines onto the local wine map. Locally supporters like The Flying Pickle in Tivvy and the Toucan Cafe in Bampton have been joined by the Anchor Inn at Exe Bridges in flying the local wine flag – so that we now reckon on having close to 100 outlets supplying at least one local wine.

Each week seems to bring a new fan.

The New Year got off to a flier with the news that the very fashionable Hotel Endsleigh has put Yearlstone's rose onto it's main list..

.Put it all together and Devon is proving it's the natural home for all those who believe in truly local food.

So if you're running a local pub or restaurant why not follow Clovelly & put together your own Devon wine list. I reckon there are at least 50 wines to choose from & I guarantee many of those will be a darn sight better than a generic " Pinot Grigio", ( which probably comes from Eastern Europe and has very little or no PG in the bottle!)

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That's the good news.

Let's face it we need a bit of pepping up.

Most vineyard owners in England have had an extra need to drown their sorrows this Xmas. None of us have much stock, and the amount of wine in tank from the 2012 harvest is pitiful.

The Great Depression is still glowering over us, and as we trudge through the winter pruning marathon in the January cold ( 60 days work at 5 hours a day out in the sludge or sleet) it can get pretty lonely and dispiriting. When at the Beeb there were always warnings about the risks of repetitive strain injury from typing too much – believe me it's nothing compared to the 50,000 pruning cuts needed in a 3 hectare vineyard!

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Finally I really need to correct something in the last column. I said ( and it was true ) that even the miniscule amount of grapes picked were low quality.

But we've now tasted our own Madeleine Angevine dry white, our 2012 fizz and our 2012 rose.

To our amazement they're all tasting pretty good.

What's more the new young winemaker at Pebblebed brought his wines over for Juliet's approval & one or two of those were quite special. What seems to have happened is that the primary aromas ( the aromas of the fruit itself as opposed to the aromas of the winemaking process )are particularly marked. Let's hope these last after bottling.

What it proves once again is that measuring the basics – sugar & acidity – is only a start. There are dozens of compounds in wine and many vary according the season, especially when you are on the margins of winegrowing as we are. How often do wines surprise us? I can recall one wine made on contract for a Cornish vineyard about 6–7 years ago which was – shall we say – not a favourite when picked in terms of ripeness or flavour, pretty vile in tank, bland when bottled – but a year later opened up into an astonishing peachy tropical mouthful like an Alsatian Gewurztraminer.

It's a wonderful thing wine – and often a bit of a mystery even after 17 years making a living from it!

ENDS

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