

Well I hope you all took my ten tips and enjoyed drinking a lot of Devon fizz for Xmas. Judging by the empty shelves in the shop and the near-empty bins in the cellars I think we gave the cavas proseccos and north-eastern-French fizz ( what's it called? – the name escapes me?) a run for your money.

Here in the Yearlstone household we splashed out ( yes the economic recovery really must have arrived ) on three unusual light reds – one from France, another from Sicily and the third from Brightwell Vineyard in Oxfordshire. We also had a lovely Brightwell Bacchus – which proved that even from the grapes of 2012 it was possible to produce that yummy concentrated gooseberry taste from the finest English white grape variety.

Well we deserved it.

For once the Yearlstone pruning masterplan has been put into action, and a thousand vines pruned before the Old Year was out. At this rate the whole 3 hectares will be neatly pruned, tied down and looking the business long before we re-open the cafe and shop on April 4.

The dark days of winter have been a perfect and -as it turns out- reassuring opportunity to review trading. The standout has been the more than doubling of sales to the wine trade. To my amazement four out of our top five trading customers were new in 2013. Hardly was the New Year in than our national distributor was on the phone to ask if we could quintuple shipments, mostly to launch our sparkling wine in a new chain of Cambridge restaurants.

January is also competition season. Time to spend the marketing budget. Last year we did well at the Lyons International, so we'll probably put our wines up to the Toques-Blanches and the Lyons sommeliers in April. There's also the annual contest in London between English sparkling wines and those fizzes from north-east france, the Judgement of Parsons Green.

But we are also planning to enter the world's biggest wine competition too – the International Wine Challenge in London for the first time.

Now whether you dear readers place much weight on medals from wine competitions when making a purchase is an open question. Those of you with a cynical disposition may feel its really about bragging rights in the hothouse world of wine critics and wine writers. Maybe so. But competition is what spurs us all on to do better, and beating a rival, domestic or foreign, relieves the daily slog of vinegrowing no end!

Yearlstone Vineyard & Deli Shack Cafe re-open on April 4 2014.  
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