

English Wine Week – JancisRobinson.com – Friday 18th June 2021

<https://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/english-wine-week-fizz>

Tamlyn writes The innovative, pioneering (and perhaps sometimes even a little bit crazy?) English spirit is not restricted to [Chardonnay](#), it would seem. English sparkling wines have swung through the pendulum of being made with whatever variety was to hand (Seyval Blanc, Rondo, Reichensteiner, Bacchus...), no matter how unsuitable, to being made in a conservatively classic non-vintage champagne mould – Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, stainless-steel fermentation using champagne yeasts, dosage of 7–10 g/l, 18 months to three years on the lees.

But the last few years have seen more and more 'icon' and limited-edition releases: longer lees ageing, barrel-fermented and/or barrel-aged reserve wines, single vintage, single varietal, zero dosage. Gaining confidence in their vineyards and winemaking experience, winemakers are starting to play, to experiment beyond the 'house style'. Others are taking things even further...

The Uncommon, a brand launched in 2018 by entrepreneurs Henry Connell (ex-financier) and Alex Thraves (freelance designer), is what they describe as 'unapologetically English' canned fizz. Wanting to get into the English wine industry and seeing the burgeoning canned-wine scene in the US, Connell abandoned his high-rise New York office and came back home to do a course at Plumpton College. The labels are fabulous, camp, clever and as tongue-in-cheek as the wine names. The wine inside is pretty boring (hopefully not quintessentially English) but if you want your picnic to be more Instagrammable than epicurean, you cannot go wrong with a clutch of Uncommon cans. Plus they do useful spritzers for those who want to keep their alcohol consumption low.

Exton Park have completely rebranded and have taken a radical step in a new direction. Blending magician and obsessive Corinne Seely has worked with vineyard director Fred Langdale over the past 10 years to get to the gritty details of their 24-ha (60-acre) vineyard, dividing it into nine plots by terroir and vinifying parcel by parcel, year by year, to build an extensive library of reserve wines. They're moving away, totally, from single-vintage releases or even cuvées based on one or two vintages. Instead, the entire focus of Exton Park is now going to be on their RB (reserve blend) wines, which are compositions of 23 to 32 different wines. Seely told us, 'When I start it's like a big puzzle. When I start I have so many different wines and I have to compose it in my head. I try to memorise the different tastings. I play with it for weeks, months. It takes a long time.' The result is wines that are kaleidoscopically complex and exciting. The rosé had me buzzing for days.

But perhaps the bravest (craziest) idea so far is the brainchild of Justin Howard-Sneyd MW, the producer of the wonderful Domaine of the Bee Roussillon wines. He emailed me, saying, 'I just wanted to sound you out on another project I have been playing around with recently ... With the 2014 vintage of our English sparkling wine, Hart of Gold, with the help of the Ridgeview team, I created a small range of "special dosage" wines using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. Rather in the way that whisky distillers use different wine barrels to finish different styles of whisky ("The Port finish", "The Amontillado finish" etc), this creates a range of fascinating but subtle flavour differences, using the same base wine. This is not

unprecedented. There is a Canadian fizz producer who uses [icewine in the dosage](#), and a cava producer who uses [sherry in the dosage](#). This kind of genre-bending fusion between drinks categories is becoming increasingly common, and I believe we may see special dosage sparkling wines becoming more mainstream in the years to come.' The result was remarkable! See below.

[Hart of Gold, Cuvée M Special Dosage Brut NV England 17.5/20](#)

Full bottle 1,598 g. This is part of Justin Howard-Sneyd's experimental project (working with the Ridgeview team) to create a range of 'special dosage' sparkling wines, using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. The base wine in six wines is the same. The dosage, 8 g/l, for Cuvée M is madeira.

This has a bright lemon-yellow colour. Smells just like a choisya bush in full blossom on a warm, sunny day when the scent is almost enveloping. This is quite remarkable! First, it tasted exactly like lovage and candied angelica. Then, like sucking on a stick of sugar cane. Then, as Justin's notes suggested, like muscovado sugar. Green coffee bean and lemon cordial; hazelnuts and matcha; white pepper and molasses. This is extraordinarily complex, with long, slender but steel-strong shafts of silver-bright acidity spinning the wine into a helix of beauty. Wow. Just wow. (TC)

12%

Drink 2021 – 2030

[Hart of Gold, Cuvée T Special Dosage Brut NV England 17.5/20](#)

Full bottle 1,604 g. This is part of Justin Howard-Sneyd's experimental project (working with the Ridgeview team) to create a range of 'special dosage' sparkling wines, using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. The base wine in six wines is the same. The dosage, 8 g/l, for Cuvée T is tokaj.

Rich, grilled-brioche nose. More profound, more weighty, somehow, than the Cuvée S with its Sauternes finish. Orange blossoms, orange peel, preserved ginger in syrup, apricot-sharp acidity with the coruscating intensity that tree-ripe apricots have. Streaked with an apricot-kernel bitterness and a firm underlay of toasted walnut. Complex, dramatically long, demanding all your attention and very, very exciting. (TC)

12%

Drink 2021 – 2029

[Hart of Gold, Cuvée S Special Dosage Brut NV England 17/20](#)

Full bottle 1,613 g. This is part of Justin Howard-Sneyd's experimental project (working with the Ridgeview team) to create a range of 'special dosage' sparkling wines, using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. The base wine in six wines is the same. The dosage, 8 g/l, for Cuvée S is Sauternes.

More golden in colour than Cuvée Z. Lemon-curd and honeysuckle aromas. And then, with a bit of swirling, a distinct smell of young Sauternes. Wax, frangipani, lemon marmalade. It feels dry, but there is a sweetness tucked into the origami folds of the wine. Justin's notes suggested barley sugar and saffron, and I agree. And also sun-warmed nectar-rich florals, candied grapefruit peel, lemon marzipan. Tingling acidity and the fine buzz of bubbles. Almost skipping, it's so full of energy and life. I love this! (TC)

12%

Drink 2021 – 2028

[Hart of Gold, Cuvée Z Zero Dosage Brut NV England](#) 17/20

Full bottle 1,613 g. This is part of Justin Howard-Sneyd's experimental project (working with the Ridgeview team) to create a range of 'special dosage' sparkling wines, using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. Cuvée Z is what you might call the 'control' in the experiment; the wine with zero dosage.

White florals and light toast. Green-apple crisp. Precise, clipped to topiarian perfection, with mouth-watering citrus fruit filling through the geometric angularity. Great balance and length. Lime and even a little spice. This is tap-dancing my tongue! (TC)

12%

Drink 2021 – 2027

[Hart of Gold, Cuvée J Special Dosage Brut NV England](#) 16.5/20

Full bottle 1,604 g. This is part of Justin Howard-Sneyd's experimental project (working with the Ridgeview team) to create a range of 'special dosage' sparkling wines, using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. The base wine in six wines is the same. The dosage, 8 g/l, for Cuvée J is sherry (J stands for Jerez).

This smells like a champagne that has spent many years sur lattes. I get exactly what Justin suggests – figgy richness, walnuts. This is nutty: pecans, toasted cashews, roast chestnuts with poached pears in syrup. Has a slow silkiness, winding itself around the mouth like a shot-silk scarf, but with grapefruit-flesh sharpness and grapefruit-pith-and-peel bitterness needling through and bracing the richness tautly into the structure. (TC)

12%

Drink 2021 – 2027

[Hart of Gold, Cuvée P Special Dosage Brut NV England](#) 16.5/20

Full bottle 1,614 g. This is part of Justin Howard-Sneyd's experimental project (working with the Ridgeview team) to create a range of 'special dosage' sparkling wines, using different sweet and fortified wines in the dosage. The base wine in six wines is the same. The dosage, 8 g/l, for Cuvée P is port.

I'm not sure whether this should be classified as a rosé. This is a distinctly pink caste to the colour of the wine. Justin's notes say, 'Redcurrant and plum with a twist of pepper', and before I've even tasted it, I can smell white pepper. Interestingly, although the dosage is the same as the tokaj and Sauternes finishes, this tastes drier. The palate is rounder, the acidity broader – more across the palate, moving like a palette knife, rather than slicing through the palate – and the fruit is definitely more on the black- and red-berry spectrum. Mushroom, liquorice and earthy notes. A little more solid than Cuvées Z, S and T. Food wine. (TC)

12%

Drink 2021 – 2026