



## Wiston Estate Blanc de Blancs 2011, Traditional Method, West Sussex, England

### Introduction

Nestled in the heart of England's rolling South Downs in West Sussex, the beautiful Wiston Estate has been in the hands of the Goring family since 1743 and is presided over today by Harry and Pip Goring. The estate is managed by their son Richard and both he and his wife, Kirsty, are now involved in the day to day running of the vineyard and winery.

It was Pip's long-held belief that the estate held the potential to grow high quality grapes and in 2006 her dream came to fruition when Wiston's 6.5ha vineyard was planted on a south/south-east-facing escarpment of pure chalk, like the renowned *Côte des Blancs* in Champagne. Under the guidance of winemaker Dermot Sugrue with a strict philosophy of sustainability, the tight-knit team produces award-winning sparkling wines of exceptional purity and finesse from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier.

### 2011 Vintage

The 2011 growing season began with a wonderfully warm and dry Spring, which was followed by a very poor flowering season extended over several weeks. The result was considerable variability in grapes' ripeness and a tiny yield. Things took a turn for the better though with a heatwave at the end of August that continued through into the Autumn, with the warmest September temperatures in meteorological history. These warm, dry weather conditions persisted into October, resulting in a warm dry harvest. The small crop lead to exceptional ripeness; hence there was no need for chaptalisation in 2011 or malolactic fermentation.

### Vineyard Information

**Location:** South Downs, West Sussex. A natural sun-trap, and protected from prevailing winds, the south-facing vineyard slope benefits from maximum sun exposure, promoting ripening.

**Climate:** Moderate rainfall, cool winters and temperate summers couple with cool breezes from the south coast, allowing the grapes to ripen slowly but fully and retain the crucial acidity and freshness vital to produce high-quality sparkling wine.

**Soils:** Wiston's vineyard sits on an ancient chalk seam covered by a shallow layer (10-30 cm) of topsoil, an ideal growing medium for vines. As in so many areas producing wines of outstanding quality, it is this chalky soil that is held to impart the complex flavours and structural elegance to the grapes and the wine itself.

**Philosophy:** As part of a larger agricultural estate with the utmost respect for nature, Wiston's vineyard is run according to a strict philosophy of sustainability. The team's efforts include the installation of solar panels at the winery as a source of renewable energy. Natural methods are used in the vineyard to optimise health and balance; the vines require careful tending by hand, one by one, to ensure that the leaf canopy is optimised. A Boisselet cultivator allows us to manage root and weed growth by returning them gently to the soil, rather than resorting to 'quick fix' chemical herbicides and synthetic fertilisers.

**Harvest:** The tiny yields (15 hl per hectare) are critical to Wiston Estate's purity, focus and elegance. The 2011 harvest was carried out by hand by a team of skilled pickers in October.

### Winemaking Details

**Grape varieties:** 100% Chardonnay

**Pressing:** The grapes were gently pressed in a traditional, gentle Coquard basket press to preserve the delicate fruit flavours and aromas in the juice. They are pressed as whole bunches. Wiston's Coquard is one of only 4 Coquard presses found outside of France's Champagne region and the only one of its kind to be found in England.

**Fermentation & maturation process:** 60% of the grapes were fermented in stainless steel tanks and 40% in a mixture of old Burgundy barriques with a range of ages using selected yeasts. Barrels are used to promote a gentle micro-oxygenation process, refining the mouthfeel and structure of the wine; there is no oak flavour imparted to the wine due to the age of the barrels. The wine is rested on its lees for nine months, bringing additional complexity of structure.

Due to the ideal ripeness of the fruit malolactic fermentation was blocked leaving the wine with natural malic 'energy'. This not only brought verve and focus to the final blend but also gives the wine fantastic ageing potential. The wine was cold stabilised and lightly filtered, but not fined, before yeast and nutrients were added (*liqueur de tirage*) for the secondary fermentation in bottle. Bottling took place in July 2012.

**Ageing & disgorging:** The wine underwent a slow secondary fermentation and was kept on its side, under crown cap (*sur lattes*) at cool 11-degree temperatures for 6 years, while it matured and took on flavour and structure through the process of autolysis. Autolysis is one of the crucial processes in the production of high-quality sparkling wines, imparting a unique combination of complex flavours and textural finesse (it is worth noting that Champagne must spend only 15 months on its lees compared to Wiston's goal of 3-5 years). It will be first released in January 2019.

To preserve the wine's natural poise and balance, dosage was restrained, with only 8g/l required to complete the wine (NB: compare this to the standard Champagne 'Brut' dosage: typically 12g/l). A further 3 months' ageing on cork took place prior to release, to allow the flavours to marry.

### Tasting Note

Selected from the chalkiest and steepest part of Wiston's vineyard, Blanc de Blancs 2011 is elegant and expressive, with enticing notes of white peach, apricot, brioche and crushed oyster shells. This decadent single vineyard, single vintage, single varietal Blanc de Blancs is perfect for immediate drinking and will also age beautifully.