



Wiston Estate Cuvée 2008 Magnums, Traditional Method, West Sussex, England

Introduction

The beautiful family-run Wiston Estate is nestled in the heart of England's rolling South Downs in West Sussex. The Wiston Estate vineyard lies on an exceptional, south-facing chalk escarpment similar to Champagne, and planted with the classic grape varieties Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Employing time-honoured methods Wiston produces a sparkling wine of exceptional finesse and quality.

Background

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 conviction that the estate held the potential to grow high quality grapes. The 16-acre vineyard, planted in 2006, was the fruit of her dream and tenacity. Wiston Estate is a family venture, small in scale, impressive in aspiration and unrelenting in pursuit of quality. Under the aegis of award-winning winemaker Dermot Sugrue, the tight-knit team spares no effort in the vineyard or winery.

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 pioneering efforts include the installation of solar panels at the winery as a source of renewable energy. Similarly their use of a Boisselet cultivator allows them to manage root and weed growth by returning them gently to the soil, rather than resorting to 'quick fix' chemical herbicides and synthetic fertilisers.

The vineyard is planted on an escarpment of pure chalk, similar to the renowned *Côte des Blancs* in Champagne. Wiston Estate's vintage wines are picked by hand and gently pressed in England's only traditional Coquard press, one of the few outside France's Champagne region. The tiny yields (15 hl per hectare) are critical to Wiston Estate's purity, focus and elegance, and create a new benchmark for English sparkling wine.

Vineyard Information

Location: South Downs, West Sussex. A natural sun-trap, 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 for the production of high-quality sparkling wine.

Soils: Wiston's vineyard sits on an ancient chalk seam covered by a shallow layer (10-30cm) of topsoil, an ideal growing medium. 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: Wiston Estate believes in sustainable viticulture, using natural methods to optimise health and balance in the vineyard. The vines require careful tending by hand, one by one, to ensure that the leaf canopy is optimised.

Harvest: carried out by hand by a team of skilled pickers over 3 days from 16th -18th October 2008.

Winemaking Details

Grape varieties: 60% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir, 10% Pinot Meunier

Pressing: The grape varieties were pressed separately using a traditional, gentle Coquard basket press – as used in the Champagne region - to preserve the delicate fruit flavours and aromas in the juice. They are pressed as whole bunches.

Fermentation & maturation process: The juice was fermented separately in a mixture of 3- and 5-year old Burgundy barrels with 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 several months until springtime, bringing additional complexity of structure. The Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier were then blended together and put through malolactic fermentation to soften their natural acidities. In order to preserve its natural malic ‘energy’, the Chardonnay was then blended in without completing full malolactic fermentation, bringing verve and focus to the final blend. The wine does not need to be cold stabilised, filtered or fined; it is settled naturally before yeast and nutrients are added (*liqueur de tirage*) for the secondary fermentation in bottle.

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 just over 8 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 Vintage Champagne must spend only 3 years on its lees in comparison).

Time spent on lees is arguably the most important factor in determining quality. The magnums were riddled, then the first disgorgement took place in early October 2017. 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).

Tasting Note

Coming from their inaugural vintage, Wiston Estate’s luxurious Cuvée 2008 Magnum marks their first ever release of a magnum. With an abundance of fragrant English orchard fruits, honey, brioche, toasted hazelnuts, ginger and an underlying savoury minerality, this wine shows impressive depth and complexity, whilst retaining Wiston’s signature precision and elegance. It is a truly special cuvée, which is drinking beautifully now and will age fantastically for many years to come.