

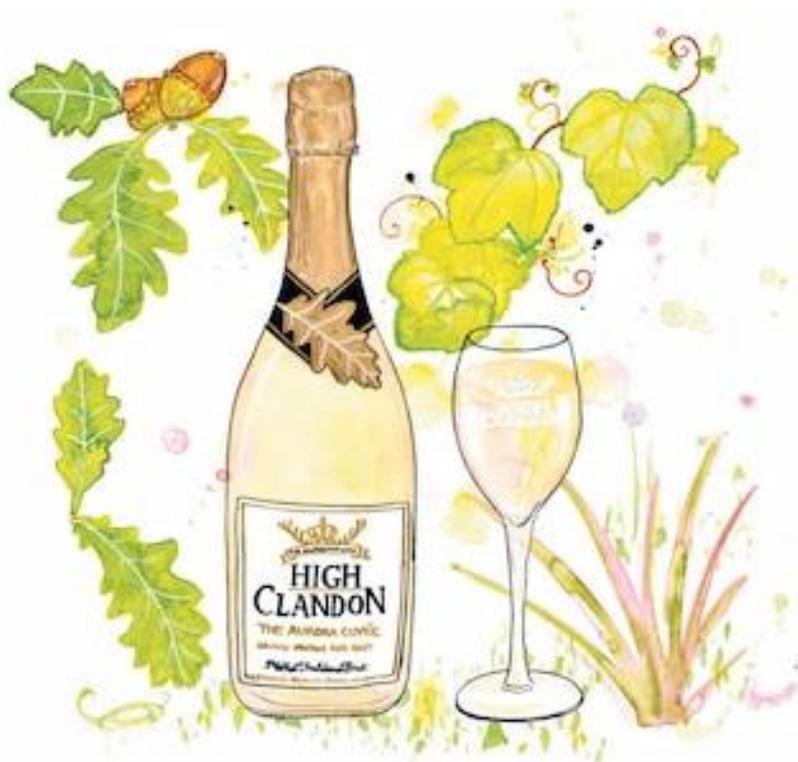
# High Clandon proves that small players make a big impact on the English wine scene

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH SATURDAY 16TH  
SEPTEMBER 2017



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## A world away from the big producers, but within sight of the capital, High Clandon is exquisite

I can see fig leaves and the tall, pointed blades of New Zealand flax. Ahead of me a house unfurls, all light and airy with expanses of glass that give on to a lawn, a wild flower meadow, and a lot of tantalisingly placed outdoor seats. Tucked just out of sight, before an undulating panorama of trees, is a small vineyard.

“We’re South African, we’re used to vistas and open views and bringing the outside in,” says

Sibylla Tindale. Except we’re not surrounded by the lush vegetation of the Cape. Those huge windows are all triple glazed, and the tiny towers I can just about make out on a distant horizon are the Shard and Canary Wharf. We’re looking out across the Surrey Hills from what might be England’s best vineyard that you’ve never heard of. **High Clandon** won the inaugural **International Wine Challenge** award for “best cellar door” earlier this year. It’s a lovely place to visit –

you arrive by winding your way up a narrow lane, through a beech and sycamore wood – but it’s also tiny.

I mean really tiny: there’s just half a hectare (1.25 acres) of vines here. The annual production is an extremely boutique 1,500-2,000 bottles a year. But the wine, which is made by **Bolney Estate** about an hour’s drive away in West Sussex, is delicious.

It seems almost insane that Bruce – a former management consultant – and Sibylla Tindale should have decided to grow vines and establish themselves as wine producers on such an economically unfriendly scale. Evidently, however, their enthusiasm and ability to get things done makes for a fairly formidable partnership.

“I’m a gardener,” says Sibylla. “I grew up on a farm near Cape Town and also in Central Africa in what is now called Zambia. My father had a huge farm there. We don’t mind getting grubby fingers, you pick it up at your mother’s and father’s knee.

“We bought this place for the views, then discovered we were on full chalk – I tried to dig a hole and couldn’t. I had to get a pick axe. And I went ‘Ping!’ Chalk is very difficult for gardens, but some of the best wines are made from grapes grown on it. So I said to Bruce, ‘That’s what I’m doing’.”

She put herself on a short course at Plumpton College, and then the Tindales planted chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier in a teeny vineyard – it runs to just 30 rows – at the bottom of their newly created wild-flower meadow. We pause on the way down to admire the smell of the wild carrots and the witch’s broom that have popped up.

With care and attention, irrespective of size, you can make good wine here  
Like the New Zealand flax up by the house – “an absolute b---- to

control but really gives you structure” – the vines are evidently managed with a sort of kind ferocity that makes it one of the most manicured vineyards I have ever seen. “I call it haute couture,” says Sibylla, launching into an explanation of how she “tips and snips” each individual bunch of tightly packed pinot meunier to give the grapes more room to breathe.

Bruce has a bit of a grouse about the pheasants that fly up from the nearby estate of Sir Rocco Forte: “They either shoot them, or they come up here to eat my grapes.” Then we settle at an outdoor table in the last of the September sunshine to try the [High Clandon Aurora Cuvée Grand Vintage Rosé 2011](#). A very pale chardonnay-based sparkling rosé, it’s the only wine that is for sale. It’s very good. But seriously, Bruce, I ask, is a vineyard as tiny as this really commercially viable?

“We certainly couldn’t live off it. And of course the cash flow with sparkling wine is so awful. You don’t get your first cash until year nine. Our ambition is just to break even at the end of the year, without taking into account a penny for our time. But this is much more than a hobby for us.”

High Clandon makes a significant contribution to the ever-growing patchwork quilt of English wine producers too. The big outfits, with ambitions for export and serious volumes, are clearly critical to the success of this industry; but the smallest players, like High Clandon,

are important not just for variety but also in showing, as Bruce puts it, “that with care and attention, irrespective of size, you can make good wine here.”

Bruce is also on the new board that will represent the interests of all wine made in the UK. With his management consultant hat on, what would his advice be to English wine as a whole?

“Oh now, this is a big issue. We’re growing very quickly. Exports are low. I think we’re going to have to have more industry cooperative ventures. We also need to get decent data – on the area under vine for each variety, plans, volumes – that currently some producers are nervous about sharing.

“I feel very strongly about this. We need to set aside some of these old reluctances.”

It will be interesting to see where this goes. For the moment, I know where I’d go if I were in the Surrey Hills and at a loose end one weekend – to High Clandon for a glass of Aurora and one of Sibylla’s delicious gougères – made with English cheese (Sussex Charmer) and good old Colman’s powdered mustard.

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/wine/high-clandon-proves-small-players-make-big-impact-english-wine/>