

DENBIES WINE ESTATE

Dorking, Surrey

Denbies claim to being England's largest vineyard looks set to run and run. Although now surpassed by larger estates such as Nyetimber none exist as a single entity of 265 acres (107ha).



Formed from the Denbies and Bradley farms just north of Dorking it is nestled in a chink in the North Downs. As a single continuous parcel it offers an extraordinary vista of vines when approached from any direction, be it by foot, car or train. To make the most of a visit to the winery be sure and view it from the fabulous panorama afforded by Box Hill which rises steeply immediately beyond the pretty Mole river, just east of Denbies estate.

As a wine estate Denbies dates from 1984 when Adrian and Gillian White (see biop) took advice from Professor Richard Selley. A bold and ambitious undertaking it gave the UK wine trade press sceptics plenty to ponder, and this before well before the string of hot years enjoyed over the past decade or so. Current direction comes from the next generation of the White family in the shape of Christopher White. With a staggering 300,000 visitors per year this a major tourist attraction by any measure and the concept and focus as a 'wine experience' is fundamental to



Left: Denbies still wines include red, white and rosé.

Right: cleaning bottles after dégorgeement prior to labelling

VINEYARD FACTS

- England largest single vineyard: 94ha of 107ha are currently in production.
- Most grapes are machine-harvested but those for sparkling wines are picked by hand.
- Spring frost can be a problem but only in lower, flatter vineyards.
- Hi-tech recycling sprayers used to reduce residual spray and help protect the environment.

Denbies' commercial success. While lacking the intimacy of a small family run vineyard Denbies nonetheless provides an excellent starting point for those new to English wine, or indeed, wine per se.





Denbies vines are nestled in the North Downs near Dorking.

Viticulture

The composition of Denbies vineyards has evolved substantially over the past 20-odd years. From a plethora of obscure varieties there has been some grubbing up of the least successful. 94 ha are currently in production with new planting restricted to infilling of rows. Despite a certain consolidation there are still plenty of names that will be new to most, to try and get your tongue around. Müller-Thurgau, Seyval Blanc, Schönburger and Reichensteiner figure strongly in the leading blended whites. In 2005 Ortega was added and in 2006 more Bacchus was added, a smart move from a quality perspective. All of the fruit is estate grown, coming immediately from around the winery. What you can see is what you get. The hillside vineyards are the most exciting for quality and includes the plantings of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier for the top sparkling wines.

Frost is a major

consideration, without protection the potential reduction in yield doesn't bear contemplation. On the slopes at least, it is not a problem. On the flatter, lower lying slopes where it is, 'frost-busters' are employed to encourage air circulation. Frost risk starts with budbreak in early to mid-April and continues until the beginning of June. Where possible mechanical harvesting is used to bring in the grapes. However, the higher slopes including all the Pinot Noir and other grapes for fizz, are harvested by hand.



Fuel oil burner used to protect vines from late frosts

The Wines

2007 Bacchus Vineyard Select



Bright, ripe and pungent, this a Bacchus that offers plenty of typical nettle and gooseberry character as well as a hint of green pepper and mineral. Round, supple and fruit-intense with balanced acidity; best within 2-3 years' of the vintage.

2006 Schönburger Vineyard Select



In this variety the berries turn from green to pink as they ripen and this is a pristine, varietal example. Enticing hedgerow and pear scents precede plump, well-concentrated fruit on a marginally off-dry palate.

2006 Ortega Vineyard Select



Denbies Ortega is both barrel-fermented and aged in oak. Aromatic with spiced melon and guava it is also denser, fuller and with more breadth than the Bacchus. The oak doesn't overwhelm and the wine is both rich in fruit and long.

Rose Hill (rosé)



Now this needs to be drunk really young. Always drink last year's vintage but from the pale cherryish colour to herbal and floral scents and the cool red fruit and herbal flavours this can make delicious summer drinking if served lightly chilled.