

Pop goes the Pig!

SUE CADE visits Ottery St Mary to find out why restaurateur Robin Rea decided it was time to add Rusty Pig fizz to the wine list

ndie restaurant Rusty Pig in Ottery St Mary is known as a champion of ethical, seasonal and locally sourced ingredients. It's a meaty enterprise, and winemaking wouldn't be an obvious diversification.

But Rusty Pig is known for its left-field approach. "One evening someone mentioned a vineyard just a stone's throw away from us, where grapes were being grown just for fun," owner Robin Rea says. "I'd just been to Oliver Gladwin's wedding in Sussex and seen his family vineyard, so I thought, why not?"

It transpired that the grapes were grown without the use of pesticides or herbicides. "That fitted so well with our own ethos – what could be better than a Rusty Pig fizz made from grapes grown locally and naturally?"

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The theory was sound - but of course winemaking isn't a simple process. Stepping into the frame was experienced winemaker, Daniel Ham. The name clinched the deal: Rusty Pig, Daniel Ham – truly a marriage made in heaven.

Daniel was a marine biologist before a trip to New Zealand convinced him that the art of wine was more important than

ENGLISH BUBBLES

The earliest evidence of English sparkling wine made using home-grown grapes is from the 1750s when a champagne-style wine was created for The Hon Charles Hamilton at his Painshill Place vineyard in Cobham by a French Huguenot refugee.

Some 200 years later, bottle-fermented sparkling wines were made from British grapes by pioneer Raymond Barrington Brock at his Oxted Research Institute. In the 1960s commercial production of English fizz started at Pilton Manor in Somerset and Felsted Vineyard in Essex using grape varieties Müller-Thurgau and, like Rusty Pig fizz, Seyval Blanc.



Photo: Matt Austin

ABOVE: Robin Rea welcomes Rusty Pig Fizz onto the restaurant's menu

the study of seaweed; he took a degree in winemaking and is now a winemaker at Langham Wine in Dorchester. He prefers using a 'low intervention' approach that - once again - sits well with Rusty Pig principles.

This process is quite unlike that used for commercially made wine, Daniel explains. "The grapes are fermented in the barrel spontaneously using the native population of yeast and bacteria from the fruit and atmosphere, resulting in a more complex wine in terms of flavour, aroma and taste."

Following the primary alcoholic fermentation, the wine stays in the barrel for eight months. It's then bottled, without being filtered, with a small amount of sugar and yeast, initiating a secondary fermentation. "It's this that

makes the wine fizzy. And the combination of proteins, fats and amino acids gives this type of English sparkling wine its signature toasty, bready note."

The wine stays in the bottle for 12 months while the yeast dies and breaks down through autolysis. Then the bottles are moved into a vertical position, the yeast slides into the neck of each bottle and is popped out to leave a beautifully clear wine. A mixture of sugar and wine, called dosage, is added to balance out the natural acidity. "Most of the fizz we drink is Brut, but Robin's wine has an unusually small amount of sugar making it Extra Brut."

After staying 'under cork' for a few months to allow the dosage to fully integrate with the wine, it's time for a taste of Rusty Pig fizz. Perfect with pork, of course! ♦ Rustypig.co.uk