

GRAPE MINDS *think alike*

With acres of beautiful vineyards, picturesque views and award-winning wines, Surrey Hills is the UK's newest premium wine region. Sophie Farrah meets its passionate producers



Chilworth Manor Vineyard and Chilworth Manor House. Photos by Julie Skelton



and tastings, and this summer there are plans for live music, food trucks and a wine bar.

My fifth and final stop is Chilworth Manor; a jaw-droppingly beautiful historic house and estate owned by Graham and Mia Wrigley, who moved there from Chiswick in 2006. The couple planted vines in 2013, making it the newest of the Surrey Hills.

"My dad had a small vineyard in the 70s in Kent – I remember helping him build it. And then in 2012, Mia's family bought me some vines my birthday," says Graham.

Winding through beautifully manicured gardens, the couple walk me down to their 10-acre plot, which produces fruit for an English rosé and, for the first time this year, a hotly anticipated sparkling wine. Currently, Chilworth Manor is the only Surrey Hills vineyard not regularly open to the public, but it hosts several annual charity events, and a new, permanent tasting barn is planned for next year. For now, pioneering Graham, who works in international development, is busy experimenting with alternatives to 'bougies', the large paraffin candles used for combatting frost. He's also this year's VotSH chairman.

"I think that the Vineyards of the Surrey Hills will become known as an umbrella that represents quality. We're all so passionate about what we do, and we're all family businesses too," he explains.

"Already it's fast becoming a destination to visit two or three vineyards in a day. I really believe that we could be the Napa Valley of the UK. We didn't realise there would be such a demand for wine tourism – it's great that there is, and most of all, it's fun!"

I'll drink to that.

Purchase wines or book tours & tastings at:
alburyvineyard.com highclandon.co.uk
denbies.co.uk greyfriarsvineyard.co.uk
chilworthmanorvineyard.com

Visit surreyhillsvineyards.co.uk for more info on VotSH.
 High Clandon's Art and Sculptures in the Vineyard takes place July 18-August 1, entrance £5pp which goes to charity.



Greyfriars Vineyard

How does a day or two of vineyard hopping and wine tasting in the sunshine sound? No, I'm not talking about the South of France, this summer it's all about the Surrey Hills.

Just 20 miles from London is a cluster of five beautiful vineyards, each producing internationally award-winning wines in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Together, they have formed Vineyards of the Surrey Hills (VotSH) – a new, world class wine

tourism destination, created to celebrate the excellence of the wine being produced there. Cultivated on limestone hills that share the same geological stratum as the Champagne region, all five family-run vineyards are located along the rolling North Downs Way, its south

facing slopes, chalky soil and micro-climate providing optimum conditions for top quality harvests. But despite their proximity, each vineyard has something very different to offer, as I discover on my tour of the five.

I begin at Albury, a small, beautiful vineyard just outside Guildford where Nick Wenman fulfilled his lifelong dream of planting vines in 2009, after retiring from the IT industry. Today, he runs the business with his daughter Lucy and vineyard managers, Dominic and Alex.

"Everyone has historically thought of Sussex and Kent as key wine growing regions, but we want to put the Surrey Hills on the map," enthuses Lucy, as she showed me around their 12-acre plot. Albury is the only organic vineyard in the Surrey Hills, and one of very few in the UK. It produces a range of delicious, award-winning sparkling wines made from traditional Champagne variety grapes, but it is their Silent Pool Rosé that has made the biggest splash.

Visitors can enjoy various tours and tastings, or just pop in for a glass (or bottle) amongst the vines. This summer, there's an array of events planned, including live music, bee-keeping demonstrations and cheese tastings.

My next visit, less than a 10-minute drive away, is High Clandon, the smallest of the Surrey Hills. South African owner Sibylla Tindale whisks me inside to her

art-filled glass barn, which acts as an elegant tasting room and shop, and then down to the small, but perfectly formed, one-acre vineyard at the bottom of the garden, where she and husband Bruce tend to each vine by hand.

"We look after different grapes – I am the Pinot queen, and Bruce is the Chardonnay king. I won't let him touch my vines!" she laughs.

The offering here is aged-matured vintage fizz only; each release has won multiple awards, and it sells out every year.

"We're all about the romance of winemaking," smiles Sibylla. "And it's great to have independent tasters say that it's good – it underpins what we are trying to do."

Visits to the vineyard are by appointment only, whilst monthly tours and tastings can be pre-booked. This month, Bruce and Sibylla are also hosting Art and Sculptures in the Vineyard, an annual event set in



Bruce & Sibylla Tindale of High Clandon Vineyard

their beautiful gardens and wildflower meadow. It also marks the launch of their 2016 vintage.

"I've called it Euphoria, which is a Grecian state of bliss and happiness. Just what we need after the year we've all had," says Sibylla.

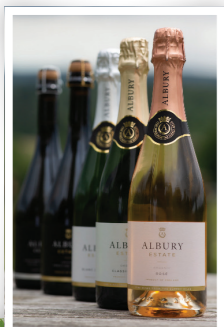
At a whopping 627 acres, my next stop, Denbies, is at the other end of the scale. Until recently, it was the largest single-estate vineyard in the UK, with 265 acres 'under vine'. Established in 1986, the estate encompasses a large winery, hotel, restaurant, shops and various visitor experiences, as well as seven miles of public footpaths open to all. It produces a wide range of award-winning still and sparkling wines, some of which I try in one of the vineyard's new, luxury heated cabanas.

"English wine used to be very rustic, but now what's produced in Surrey and beyond is fantastic," explains Front of House and Tours Manager, Anne Denny.

"Surrey Gold is our most popular wine, and it's actually the first wine Denbies ever produced. It's quite Germanic in style – off dry, but nice and fruity and aromatic."



Wine tasting at Denbies



The winemakers of Albury