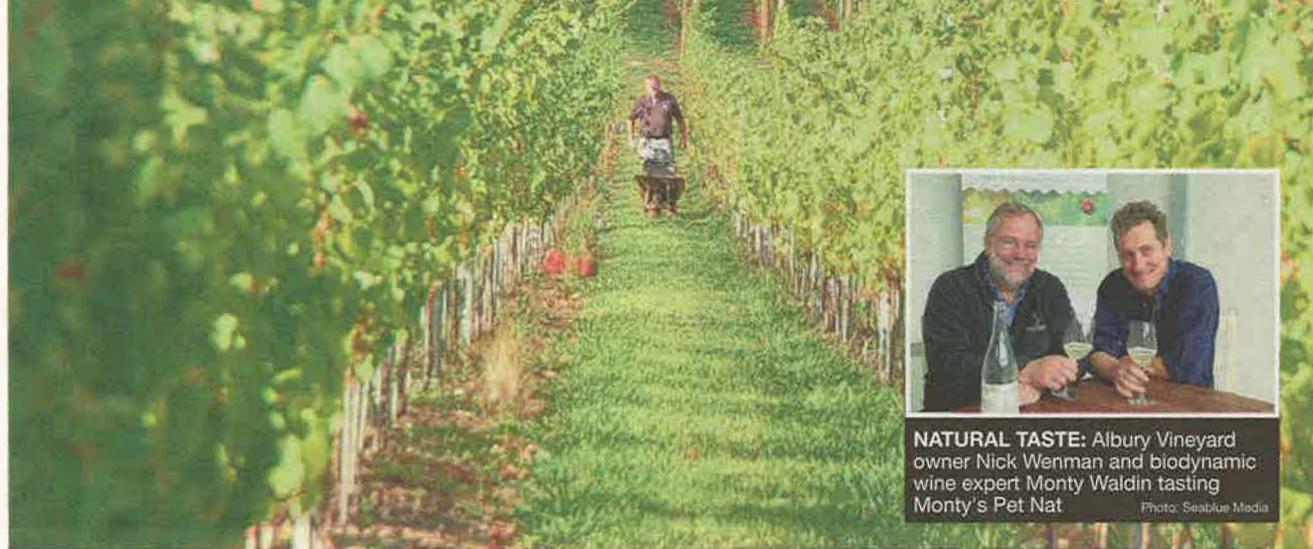


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RAISE A GLASS TO WINE WEEK



NATURAL TASTE: Albury Vineyard owner Nick Wenman and biodynamic wine expert Monty Waldin tasting Monty's Pet Nat

Photo: Seablu Media

Celebrate English Wine Week with a glass produced on our doorstep. **Caroline Jones** of Nutfield-based website Local Food Britain visits Albury Organic Vineyard and discovers how Mother Nature is being left to her work...

WE HAVE many things to thank the Romans for – indoor plumbing, paved streets, public libraries – but perhaps one of their greatest gifts to Britain was the introduction of the vine.

Though our rainy, windswept isles might not at first glance bear much resemblance to the sun-drenched terraces of Tuscany or the famous chateaux of Champagne, our vineyards can more than hold their own against their continental counterparts – a fact that Nutfield-based website Local Food Britain is celebrating this English Wine Week from Saturday (May 23) to Sunday, May 31.

In a sleepy corner of Surrey near Guildford is Local Food Britain member Albury Organic Vineyard, where owner Nick Wenman and vineyard manager Alex Valsecchi carefully nurture 21,000 vines. As well as being organic, their grapes are grown biodynamically, in harmony with nature, which Nick believes produces the best quality wine.

"These days English wines compete with the best in the world, especially the sparkling wines," he says. "As an organic vineyard we enjoy creating wines that are as natural as possible too."

Nick's methods have fans in high places: Albury's Silent Pool Rosé was served aboard the Royal Barge for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and this year will see the vineyard's first sparkling wine, Albury Estate Premier Cuvée,

SPARKLING: This year sees the Albury Estate premier cuvée go on sale

Photo: John Powell



go on sale.

Nick isn't afraid to try something different either, and his latest release is the UK's first pétillant naturel, a sparkling wine produced largely by leaving nature to its own devices.

Persuaded by biodynamic wine expert Monty Waldin to use some of Albury's Chardonnay grapes for the venture, Nick was excited by the prospect of creating a truly natural English wine. With the help of expert French winemaker Matthieu Elzinga of Litmus Wines – and the blessing of Mother Nature – Monty's Pet Nat was born.

Litmus Wines is based at Denbies near Dorking and is responsible for making some of England's best-known wines but, despite their many years of experience, producing the UK's first pet nat was a risk.

"Normally the winemaker controls the natural fermentation but with a pet nat, everything is up to nature," Matthieu

explains. "We were all conscious that it might be problematic, but it has turned out tremendously."

Nick agrees: "It was an opportunity to do something for the very first time, and it wasn't particularly easy with our British climate. But it's turned out really great – it's a fresh, clean and crisp dry wine and we're delighted with it."

With only 600 bottles of Monty's Pet Nat available this time, would he do it again? "Perhaps next year – we might do a pink one."

Flushed with success, Matthieu is keen to produce another pet nat with Albury and is excited about the prospects for English wine in general. "It's a fairly new community, there's a lot to do and discover, to explain and tell," he says. "With my knowledge from France, and from Litmus internationally, we are aiming to make the best wine in the UK."

For now, Nick's hoping for a long, hot summer so he can think about making the Albury's first red wine. "Our cool climate here keeps acids high and sugars low in the fruit, which is ideal for sparkling but not great for red – the only way to achieve it is if the weather is really good." Let's keep our fingers crossed.

RECIPE



Everybody loves a classic tart

Frank Dudley of Vineking and Elaine Phillips of COOK offer suggestions on trying out the classic tart.

One has to admire the sheer versatility of a good tart. There is always a time and place for the classic quiche, but when something lighter, more decorative and with punchy flavours is required then look no further than a tart.

Keep a tart to hand and you instantly have a light lunch or late supper.

The first recipes for tarts were written in 1570 by an Italian chef Bartolomeo Scappi and appear in England in 1615. During Tudor times pastry had evolved from the medieval inedible crust to a refined product to be enjoyed in its own right.

At COOK we have three tarts which all provide perfect summer eating.

There is the roasted salmon and dill with generous chunks of smoked salmon in a buttery puff pastry case; beetroot and feta, where the crumbled and creamed feta complements the

earthiness of the beetroot and my personal favourite, the French onion where the marriage of cheese and crisp pastry is matched with sweet, glossy caramelised onions.

At The Vineking, you can see the shift to the lighter wines to accompany the lighter dishes and the warmer weather we have, hopefully, for the next couple of months.

The 80's has a lot to answer for, shoulder pads, big hair, leg warmers and the DeLorean. However an 80s classic wine is thankfully making its way back into fashion again. This week I present the muscadet.

Made at the furthest end of the Loire Valley, France on the Atlantic coast, from 100 per cent Melon de Bourgogne. This is the perfect wine to have on the table with these lighter dishes. Look for Sur Lie on the label, this means the wine has stayed into contact with the yeasts in aging (similar to champagne) This gives the lovely fruit-driven wines some depth and extreme drinkability (pretty sure that's not a word!)

Grab a tart, a glass and enjoy.