



A fine wine experience in the Surrey Hills

The 265 acre Denbies Wine Estate is located on the North Downs and within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The estate's south facing slopes, chalky soil and warm micro-climate are well suited to producing fine English wines and Denbies has become one of the UK's largest and most successful wineries.

Its wines are award-winning, achieving top awards for quality in international and UK competitions.

From a wine tourism perspective, Denbies has also developed a visitor experience that is likely unequalled.

In addition to the winery and vineyard tours, naturally with tastings, there are two fine dining restaurants and the new farmhouse Vineyard Hotel.

Miles of walking and cycle paths and bridalways criss cross the estate and the natural beauty of the Surrey Hills lies just beyond.

An annual programme of special events can enhance a visit to Denbies.

And as befits an estate that has long recognised the role nature and the seasons' plays in the productions of its wines, Denbies places great emphasis on a sustainable, carbon neutral, approach to us enjoying the estate and its wines.

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays traveller





Just the very happiest of happenstances

By Ashley Gibbins

Visiting Denbies it takes no time at all to appreciate why this flourishing wine estate is one of the UK's most successful in the, relatively recent, art of English winemaking.

For wine making is an undoubted art with its producers true artisans.

And winemaking in the UK, on any scale, can be traced back decades rather than centuries.

It was not until well into the second half of the 20th century that commercial grape growing and wine making really began to take off. This is certainly true with the Denbies Wine Estate.

Go back to 1984 and one would find Denbies a traditional arable and crop farm that had become unviable and was put up for sale by the then owners.

Purchased by Sir Adrian Edwin White, it was clear that something dramatic was needed to make the Denbies estate a viable operation.

And that's where happenstance arises.

As a journalist, I get real pleasure from using a word that fits just perfectly and, in this case, happenstance does just that.

A chance or accidental happening because of certain circumstances not planned by anyone.

This is where Prof Richard Selby enters the Denbies story.

An oil engineer by trade, Selby also lived in the area and realised the estates south facing slopes, chalk and flint soil and warm micro-climate was just the right combination for growing grapes from which to produce wine.



The professor prepared an impromptu report for Adrian White who also saw the potential, did the maths, and began planting vines two years later.

Skip forward just under 35 years and Denbies Wine Estate, now under the day to day management of Adrian son Christopher, has the largest vineyard in England.

Its 265 acres under vines produce a range of 14 fine still white and rose still and sparkling wines and one red – some 400,000 bottles in a good vintage and about 10% of total UK wine production.

Its *Surrey Gold* and *Flint Valley* whites are the two biggest-selling English wines Denbies' Chalk Ridge Rosé 2010 won an IWC Gold and was named 'Best Rosé in the World'.

The estate attracts over 350,000 day and staying visitors every year, with its chateau style centre housing the wine and gift shop, an art gallery local farm shop and a craft brewery.

Denbies also has two fine dining restaurants and recently opened England's first Vineyard Hotel (see below), with a health and wellbeing centre arriving in spring of 2020.

As befits the natural nature of its business, Denbies is striving to become a carbon neutral operation and also lets areas of its vineyard go untreated to encourage the native wildflowers.

This has seen a real increase in birds, including partridge, wagtails and woodpecker, on the estate.

The planting of 1,600 oak and hazel trees will be more greatly appreciated by generations to come.

It all makes Denbies Wine Estate a hugely enjoyable place to visit for a day or two or as a base for taking in the whole of the Surrey Hills.

More information

www.denbies.co.uk

Enjoying the fruits of their labour



One of the joys of visiting a winery is, need I say, tasting the fruits others labours, while also learning more about the winemakers art.

Denbies offers a range of tours and tasting opportunities, which will be run by an estate wine expert.

For our tasting experience, we were 'paired' with wine buff Jeremy Blood.

Jeremy was excellent and it was genuinely rewarding and great fun to be able to spend time with someone so passionate about wine and so well versed about Denbies wines in particular.

Denbies offers a range of wine tasting experience including food and wine pairing.

For the chance to get out in the vines, Denbies has its *Secret Vineyard Tasting Trail* on Saturday's during the height of the season.



This sees a wine guide leading the tour along the trail while providing information on the vineyard, grape varieties and the wine production process and tasting, of course.

There is also a cheese and wine making experience with a morning at Norbury Blue Dairy, based at Norbury Park Farm in Mickleham, lunch at Denbies and an afternoon of wine appreciation and tasting.

A similar tour (that we did), involves a trip to *The Gin Kitchen*, producers of Gutsy Monkey to get a hands-on gin distilling experience (see below).

More information

www.denbies.co.uk/tours-and-experiences/



There is every likelihood of finding something special happening at Denbies, as the estate has locked in an annual calendar of events

Top of the list is the *Surrey Bacchus Marathon and Half-Marathon*, in September, when those 2,750 lucky enough to get a place turn out in fancy dress to run the various courses through the vines.

Live bands play on route with the drinks stations offering water or wine options.

A 5k run with ParkRun also takes place every Saturday at Denbies, come rain or shine with all welcome.

Birds of prey are also regularly flown above the vineyard by members of the Henfold Birds of Prey society.

And for art lovers, the Denbies Picture Gallery has enabled hundreds of artists and photographers to stage exhibitions of their work.

www.denbies.co.uk/events

Always something going on





A room with a stunning vineyard view

By Ann Mealor

I enjoyed Denbies English wines on a couple of previous occasions in London, and was looking forward to the opportunity to visit the vineyard and stay at its newly opened hotel.

I expected to see vines, of course, but I was surprised by the vastness of the estate, the beauty of the surroundings and the added visitor attractions of a well stocked farm shop, a popular and bustling café, wine, gift shop and gallery and two excellent restaurants.

However, I was most surprised by how many local people used the miles of winding footpaths through the vines and woods to walk their dogs, go for a family stroll, keep fit or train for a specific event such as the Denbies Bacchus Marathon.

The whole estate has been embraced by the community and is a valued local leisure resource as much as it is a working vineyard.

The new Vineyard Hotel

The new Vineyard Hotel, with its 17 ensuite rooms is situated in the heart of Denbies Wine Estate and has impressive views across the rolling vineyards to the woods on the horizon.

It has a quaint farmhouse feel, but with a modern twist.

We stayed in the newly built wing named *The Brokes*.

The rural setting and sympathetic design may trick you into thinking it was a former stable block or barn but the whole annexe has been constructed from scratch.



After checking in at reception, located in the original mid-18th Century farmhouse, also newly renovated as part of the expansion, we wheeled our cases through the prettily landscaped, cottage garden style courtyard to our room.

Large and chic, with mesmerising views over the vines, it was decorated in warm mustards, greens, and greys with pretty red and white candy striped blinds on the windows.

A small round table with a comfortable easy chair either side provided the perfect spot for in-room sampling of one of Denbies award winning *Sparkling Bacchus*.

The well stocked hospitality tray included a selection of teas, coffees, shortbread biscuits and a pack of two moorish Tregoes toffee waffles.

A larger pack, if required can be purchased from the farm shop!

I was also impressed with the small, stainless steel flask filled of fresh milk as I am not a fan of the small long life cartons favoured by most hotels and always have to ask for a jug of real milk for my in-room drinks. So this was a treat and a great idea.

The bathroom was spacious and modern with a large walk-in shower and a heated towel rail.

Best of all were the luxurious, eco-friendly, French vineyard inspired, Caudalie products, which I love.

The hotel is striving to be carbon neutral, using solar panels to generate much of its electricity, which is really good to know.



The Vineyard Restaurant

Two fine dining options at Denbies

By Ann Mealor

Denbies has two excellent restaurants in *The Gallery* and *The Vineyard Restaurant*.

The Gallery

The Gallery, contemporary in style with a high, vaulted, wooden ceiling is open daily for lunch.

It's located on the third floor of the winery and has far reaching views over the vineyard, Box Hill and the North Downs.

On a sunny day it really comes into its own as light fills the restaurant and the views are hypnotising – you just want to sit and stare.

For starters, on the day we lunched there, I chose the silky, smoked salmon mousse, beetroot and dried black olive.

It was a great mix of flavours and texture and cleanly presented in a pristine, white bowl with a huge rim.

Ashley had the cauliflower soup sprinkled with black olive.

It was piping hot, smooth and velvety without being too thick and the warm focaccia bread had a crisp, sea salty top.

For mains we both chose cauliflower risotto with Norbury Blue cheese and candied Brazil nuts.

I am not a massive risotto fan, but this was delicious, light yet creamy with the Brazil nuts adding crunch and sweetness and the Norbury Blue giving it a tangy richness.

Seasonal menus are created by the Gallery team which also includes daily specials and all food is sourced from local suppliers whenever possible.



The Gallery



The Vineyard Restaurant

The Vineyard Restaurant, situated in The Orangery is where all the evening action takes place.

Light and airy there are wonderful views across the vines from every table.

Even in winter, there is enough to look at including trees lit by colourful spotlights, casting shadows across the lawn.

In summer, the full length Orangery windows are opened and tables are laid out on the patio so that alfresco dining can be enjoyed to the full.

Dining tables are chunky, farmhouse in style and made from recycled oak.

The chairs are extremely comfortable, ergonomically designed, tan in colour and made from vegan leather.

We enjoyed some marinated gordal olives and sipped a glass of Denbies vibrant, fresh and creamy sparkling Blanc de Blancs whilst we looked at the menu.

For my first course, I chose the salmon pastrami, beetroot, horseradish and treacle yoghurt and Ashley the salsify, crispy hen's egg, tonka mayonnaise and burnt onion.

We ate slowly to make the most of the earthy flavours and fresh ingredients.

Next, we both went for the stone bass on orzo with blood orange, crab and topped with crispy, curly kale.

The fish was soft and flakey and sat well with the nutty orzo and zesty orange. It was a colourful combination.

The sides were a tasty addition too – triple cooked chips with umami salt and root vegetables, with Brazil nuts and marmite. Different and delicious.

Luckily we had room for dessert; toffee apple pudding with milk ice cream and pear crumble, raspberry hash, vanilla mascarpone and lemon balm.

We shared them between us – the crumble had crunch and looked stylish topped with the bright red raspberry and the toffee apple pudding was dark, moist and rich, complimented by the white, light ice cream.

Finally, it was the regional cheese selection of *Tremains*, *Norbury Blue* and my favourite, the velvety goat's cheese brulee topped with flaked almonds.

The service from Stephen was excellent – friendly and knowledgeable.

He selected a Denbies white wine for each course, including a crisp and rich *Ranmore Hill*, one of my top choices, and an award winning luscious Noble Harvest dessert wine.

Despite having had a four course evening meal the night before, we were still looking forward to our Denbies breakfast.



Back again in *The Orangery*, there was a good variety of local produce on offer including 'Chalk Hills' sourdough bread, 'West Horsley' yoghurts and Surrey honey.

I tucked in to a full English, including a Hill House Farm Sausage, homemade beans and smoked dry cured bacon.

My poached egg was cooked perfectly – it has to be done right for me to enjoy it!

Ashley went for the sourdough, mashed avocado, smoked salmon and poached egg. He gave it a big 'thumbs up'.



And finally, the Conservatory Restaurant offers a more relaxed, informal dining option.

A visit to Denbies Estate is all about great food, wine and views.

And exploring the miles of footpaths winding through the vines is the ideal way to burn off those extra calories.

History still being made by Kate and Helen



Those looking for a trip away from Denbies but still with synergy can try half-day gin making experience at *The Gin Kitchen*.

This is run by Kate Gregory and Helen Muncie, in a collection of agricultural buildings a short drive from Denbies.

The name itself comes in homage to Kate's kitchen, where the first of their gin was distilled.

If Denbies transition from farming to wine making was the consequence of happenstance, with the resulting good fortune, the *The Gin Kitchen* has a back story with a genuine eureka moment.

Kate and Helen were both working in air combat (think Kelly McGillis in *Top Gun* as Kate explains) until that day, back in 2016, when Kate was listening to Radio 4 while driving to the airport for a military conference in Paris.

On came a programme extolling the joy of gin making and Kate's life changed.

For she just knew this was what life had planned for her - despite not being all that keen on gin.

But as an engineer and with a science degree, Kate locked into the distilling process itself and knew she could do this.

First call was to best friend Helen to tell her she would be joining Kate in the venture (That's what friends are for).



Kate Gregory and Helen Muncie

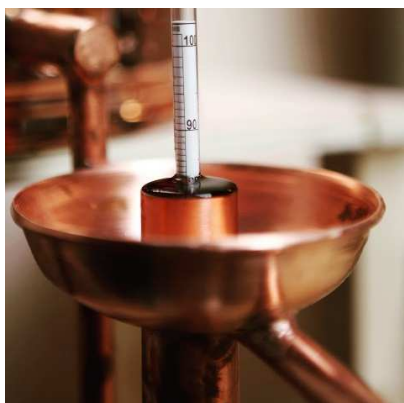
And the rest as they say is history - or history 'still' in the making

The aim of the new venture was to make gin more powerful when adding tonic (not less) and *Gutsy Monkey* their first gin, and sold in distinctive porcelain bottles, lived up to its name.

The first bottles were sold to the Red Bar in Dorking, and still is, and other pubs and bars in the area came on board.



A range of four gins



Things took off from there and the range of gins now offered by *The Gin Kitchen* has risen to four with the addition of *Dancing Dragon Tail*; *Blushing Monkey* and *The Ginger Cat*

These are found throughout the local area and regularly as gin of the month at Fortnum and Mason, as well as being exported to Singapore, Australia and throughout Europe.

The Kitchen Gin also runs gin pairing dinners, gin infused cocktail parties and the gin making experience Ann and I went on.

With Kate's help we got to choose the combination of botanicals that would make our Gin (*Mystic Mule*) unique before being taken through the distilling and bottling process.

The recipe is carefully logged should the blend ever be required in future.

This approach is proving popular with those gin connoisseurs who have found their perfect blend and couples getting married who want something special to serve on the happy day.

Lingfield Park Racecourse also gives a limited edition gin to jockey's winning its races.

And those, like us, who are staying or dining at Denbies get to have their gin served as an aperitif.

It all makes for a very interesting and highly enjoyable two plus hours with Kate and her team.

And please look out for our *Mystic Mule* the next time you are at Fortnum & Mason's



More information

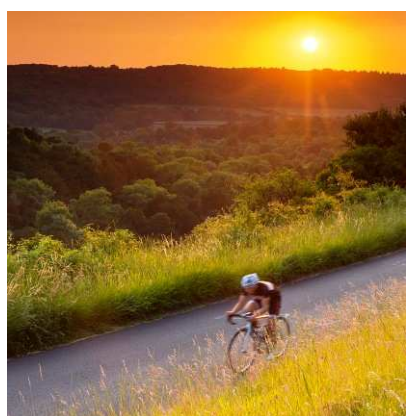
www.gin.kitchen

The Surrey Hills



Images : www.johnmillerphotography.com

Natural beauty abounds beyond Denbies



Those using the Denbies hotel as a base for a short break will find themselves staying within the officially designated Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It is one of 46 nationally protected ANOB landscapes in the UK takes in some 163 sq mi of the county of Surrey.

The Hills area stretches from the North Downs that run from Farnham in the west and above Guildford, Dorking and Reigate to Oxted in the east.

This embraces a variety of quintessential English countryside, with rolling chalk downs of yew and box woodland and flower rich grasslands.

Then there is the acid heaths and woodland of the Greensand Hills that rise to form the highest point in south east England at Leith Hill.



Much of the Surrey Hills area is owned by conservation bodies including the National Trust and there is an excellent network of footpaths and long distant walks including the North Downs Way, Greensand Way and the Pilgrims' Way



Beauty spots along the way include Box Hill, Leith Hill and the Devil's Punch Bowl together with small market towns and country villages.

More information

www.surreyhills.org

A snapshot of Denbies Wine Estate



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