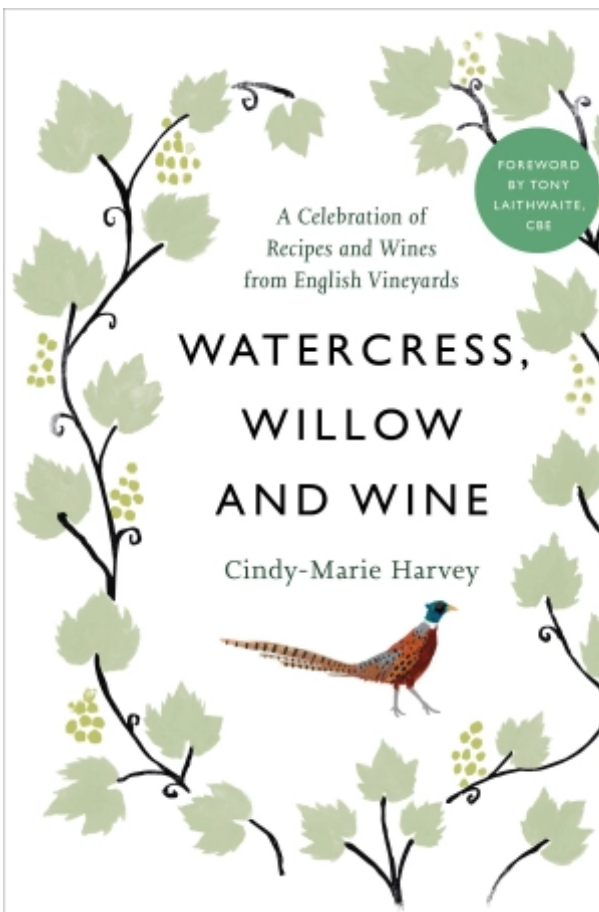


Interview: Cindy-Marie Harvey, author of *Watercress, Willow and Wine*



What inspired you to come up with the idea for the book?

Like many people, there has been a potential book meandering around the edges of my mind for quite a while, and it was always going to be about food & wine pairing. But in lockdown, as all of the tours that I organise to vineyards around the world were not happening, I started doing online Zoom tastings for clients. I would choose between 6 – 10 wines and I would send recipes to match for clients to cook at home and share on screen during the tasting. I would also send suggestions of cheeses or charcuterie as easy pairings, and discovered a wealth of lesser known artisan

cheeses and cured meats made in Britain. So after one particular English Wine tasting, with a glass of Pinot Blanc in hand, the germ of Watercress, Willow & Wine was created.

Why is it the right time for a book about English wine now?

English Wine is experiencing a really exciting time, as wine lovers both at home and abroad are starting to discover its quality and diversity. No longer a “patriotic one off” purchase, English wine is establishing a very loyal following – from sparkling wines that have repeatedly beaten top Champagne producers in blind tastings at international awards, through to crisp whites that delight the palate, fruit filled Rosés perfect for a picnic, even the fickle grape variety of Pinot Noir has found a happy new home in the South of England.

How did you develop the recipes for the book – were they directly inspired by your visits to the vineyards and tastings of the wine?

Some of the recipes draw inspiration from the produce of the county where the wine is produced, such as watercress in Hampshire. Some of them are inspired by my meanderings around the vineyards of the world, so might have an Italian influence but using clams from Cornwall or apples from Kent. Some of them indeed direct from the vineyards themselves. But the starting place was always the featured wine from each producer in the book. So it was a case of pouring a glass of the chosen wine, sitting quietly with a notebook and giving my creative food-brain free range to see what flavours the wine could inspire. It was such a tough job!

There’s a wide range of cuisines in the book, were you surprised at how adaptable the wines were in terms of dishes they would pair with?

Not really, as that was one of the reasons that I wrote the book – to share this incredible versatility with people. At the moment, quite a few wine lovers still think that we only make sparkling wines in this country – so spreading the word about what great food friendly still English wines there are being produced – and that will pair happily with a myriad of food styles. I hope the book encourages people to try new pairings – I’d love to see more people drinking white wine with cheese (rather than red) and also more people understanding that Sparkling wines are not just as an aperitif – but are fabulous with a meal as well.

It’s a beautiful book and I love the illustrations. Why did you decide on the drawings rather than photographs?

Much as I love great food photography, for this book I wanted a very quintessentially English feel – and was lucky enough to discover the brilliant illustrator, Chloe Robertson who lives just down the road from myself in the South Downs. As I envisioned the book as taking readers on a voyage of discovery of English wine, I wanted to make it as accessible as possible. I feel that illustrations are a lot more forgiving to the home cook – I’m sure that I’m not alone in having cooked a recipe for the first

time and looked at the spectacular accompanying photo and been slightly disheartened at the comparison! Chloe's beautiful illustrations give the cook an idea to aim for whilst still allowing for home creativity.

It's arguable that, although English sparkling wines have been embraced by the public, the still wines are perhaps less well understood. Is there one wine and recipe pairing in the book that you would point to that would open people's eyes to English still wines.

I absolutely agree, our still wines are getting better known but still don't have the wider spread fame of our sparkling wines (yet!). A hard call to mention just one, but perhaps the Pinot Gris from Stopham in West Sussex paired with Chameleon Curry. The off dry style of the Pinot Gris is fabulous with a host of spicy foods but also so much more.

Readers will probably be familiar with the big named vineyards in the book like Nyetimber and Chapel Down. Where would you recommend people to start if they wanted to explore some of the lesser-known vineyards?

If they are lucky enough to live close to a vineyard, then start by booking a tasting visit on their own doorstep as it were! There are so many smaller, family run wine estates that welcome visitors by appointment, where a warm welcome awaits from the people who actually grow the grapes themselves! Do visit winegb.co.uk as they have over 200 wine estates listed – You can search by location, those that offer lunches, those with accommodation and everything you need to know for a visit! From the private English Wine tours that we have organised, I can definitely say that a day out visiting a couple of English wine estates, is a great way to celebrate a birthday or just getting together with friends.

How do you think English wine tourism compares to other wine regions around the world?

In its infancy for sure, but growing rapidly and generally in the right direction. It's great to see winery restaurants opening up such as the new one at Wiston (West Sussex), at Sandridge Barton (Devon) and at Hambledon (Hampshire). But also smaller estates that offer platters of local cheeses, or as at Nutbourne (West Sussex), a glorious picnic full of home baked goodies and heritage tomatoes from a few fields away! Looking ahead, I think it's important that wine estates remember that all visitors are different, and not to follow the "one size fits all" approach of some of the New World Cellar Door operations, where the personal touch has been lost.

Did you come to any conclusions about English wine as a region in terms of style compared to other regions around the world?

Not in terms of style, as there is so much diversity – from Bacchus grapes fermented in terracotta amphorae to late harvested Ortega grapes resulting in delicious dessert wine. But one thing that did emerge, was that being a relatively young wine region,

that our winemakers are unfettered by tradition, which gives them a huge scope for experimentation – which is great news for us, the curious wine drinkers.

What will be your next project?

Well once I've been to Sicily, Alto Adige, Piemonte and Chile on tour this Autumn, I'll start focusing on my next book – but a few more glasses of wine are still needed yet, for creative purposes of course, before I decide which region to focus on!

Cindy-Marie Harvey's book Watercress, Willow and Wine is published 15 September 2022 by whitefox. Visit Cindy-Marie's website, Love Wine Food, to find out more: lovewinefood.com

Buy this book: [Watercress Willow and Wine by Cindy-Marie Harvey](#)
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