

Precocious, Delicious – A Pinot of England

Red wine, made in England. It's always a drink-worthy occasion when the 'twain fruitfully meet, and this time by way of a curious member of the pinot family whose name resonates in the craft of Alex Hurley, London Cru's young and talented Australian winemaker. His small parcel of **2019 Pimlico Road Pinot Noir Précoce**, sourced from the Greyfriars Vineyards in Surrey, is not to be missed.

Pinot what? *Précoce*: a somewhat enigmatic, cooler-climate cousin to the ubiquitous Pinot Noir, thought to have originated in the same heartlands of Burgundy, Champagne, Loire and Alsace, yet finding its most notable, current context in Germany (alias 'Fruhburgunder'). More particularly amidst the cool climes of the Ahr Valley, Franken and Rheinhessen regions. In fact, it's been an officially registered varietal in Germany as far back as 1949, though has struggled to hold its interest among growers over the decades owing to its finicky nature. (As if its grouchy, aristocratic relation weren't cause enough to keep one up at night...)

It ripens early, hence the surname. On average, two to three weeks earlier than 'Noir', which is how it's been thriving in England these last twenty-five years, where there are now just under thirty hectares planted across seventeen commercial vineyards from Cornwall to the most northerly in Leicestershire. Moreover, it's been showing an increasing potential to achieve a depth of fruit in our increasingly warming growing conditions, one that has freed it from the otherwise typical fate of blending into sparkling cuvées. Simply put, this Saxe-Coburg varietal is important to English red production simply because it can make a great wine where Pinot Noir cannot flourish.

Add to this the remarkable fact that at full ripeness, it often weighs in a degree or two higher in alcohol than standard Pinot Noir (11 – 11.5%), and you can see how English growers are on to something.

Yet Précoce is still a labour of love, often requiring a ratio of care-per-kilo not all growers are willing to take on, but one well worth it when in the right hands, as I'd discovered upon my first tasting of the **2019 Pimlico Road**: a deep, luminous ruby hue and prominently floral, sweet/sour cherry nose with slight cereal notes and hints of white pepper. Properly dry, with deeper, savoury/sour cherry fruit, flickers of butterscotch and spice; a generous but fresh and vivid, floral, bitter black cherry/graphite fruit core. The slightest hint of Burgundian wood, beautifully integrated. Supple tannins; fresh and clean on the end with final notes of pepper. This is delicious.

Put it where your Beaujolais mouth is (Morgon, Moulin-a-Vent), or where a Valpolicella or Savigny-les-Beaune would normally go -- which can also be in the fridge for thirty minutes. Or any lighter-style Pinot, for that matter, as often a well-made Précoce can be nearly impossible to discern from its more revered cousin.

Then, with the arrival of autumn, comes guinea fowl, partridge, pheasant, wood pigeon. I urge you formally introduce them. All manner of charcuterie, of course, and then something I've scandalously overlooked in past food-pairing considerations with such wines: Polish *kiełbasa*. Step into your local *sklep* and you'll discover a wealth of regional traditions, steamed, smoked or cured (or all combined!) and all of which can be grilled to enhance flavour. Amongst the more popular and appropriate options will be the *krakowa*, whose aromas of caraway, ground pepper, nutmeg and garlic fit this bill effortlessly. Otherwise, roast pork, skewered/grilled pork fillet, duck (forever duck...), roast turkey... grilled tuna steak. You get the idea.

Above all, it's the value and authenticity of the urban winery's first, all-England red. It is, in all senses, a locally grown-and-sourced, hand-crafted cuvée and as such, among the most genuine of all releases to date. This is 'why' London Cru.

But Alex only made a barrel. There's your call-to-action.