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British fizz is on the right track

Don't just head to **St Pancras** to catch the Eurostar: celebrate English Wine Week at **Searcys** and learn all about bubbles, says **Helen Coffey**

IF WE did a blind test, I don't think you'd be able to taste the difference between this and champagne." So says Razvan Tudor, our guide through a sea of sparkling wines, as we sniff and sip, savouring the "medium finish" and "light, summery flavour" of the first glass.

I'm not in Italy quaffing prosecco, nor in Spain throwing back cava. I'm certainly not in France — though I can see the Eurostar that would whizz me to Paris in just over two hours through the window. No, I'm in St Pancras International station — and the delightful flutes of fizz in front of me are all from English vineyards.

Although geography means they can't claim to be champagne, each of the three sparkling wines we're trying today at Searcys' Made in Britain Champagne School at its brasserie is made using the traditional method, meaning bar manager Tudor is quite right — I really can't tell the difference.

Sitting on elegant bar stools under flattering lighting, it's easy to forget we're in a major inner-city transport hub as, directed by Tudor, we study the straight vertical line the fine bubbles are making from the base to the top of the glass: a sign of quality.

This first tippie is produced by Greyfriars, a vineyard just outside Guildford. We're generously topped up as Tudor explains that to say they use the "traditional method" vineyards

must use a combination of only three types of grape — chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier — must ferment the wine for a second time inside the bottle and must rest it for at least 15 months.

This one, which he describes as entry level, slips down easily. A little too easily — before I know it I seem to have seen off two glasses. Thankfully the first course of our paired plates arrives — each is picked to complement the fizz,

using ingredients sourced from the UK.

To start is tomato soup with a twist — the chilled, clear broth is packed with concentrated flavour and spiked with colourful tomato pieces and sweet, acidic cubes of balsamic jelly.

With the next wine, a 2014 vintage from Furleigh Estate in Dorset, Tudor tries an experiment. First he lets us sample it poured straight from the bottle — made from all-black grapes it's drier and bolder than the first, with more backbone and hints of cooked

plums and red berries — before pouring us a glass from a decanter. We look at each other aghast — who ever heard of decanting champagne? — but the taste is completely different, less bubbly with a rounder flavour.

Four glasses down (I'm still sober enough to do basic arithmetic, just) and our second paired course arrives: a bowl of young peas and broad beans with spelt and feta. It's fresh and light, a nice contrast to the fuller-bodied wine. My

only concern is that it might not be enough to soak up the plethora of bubbles I've already consumed, but before I have time to worry my glass is being filled once more.

The final wine is from Nyetimber in Sussex, one of the oldest winemakers in England. It's been rested for a full three years and it shows. The flavour is more complex with nutty notes, the perfect accompaniment to our dessert course of a delicate Earl Grey parfait with lemon sorbet.

"All English 'champagne' houses need a bit more time," Tudor says, as he refills our flutes for the last time. "The oldest ones are 25 years old, so they're doing pretty well when you compare them to the oldest French houses founded in the 18th century."

I can't help but agree. You can keep your Moët's, your Veuve Clicquot's and your Bollinger's, I think as I pour myself off my chair and stumble tipsily out into the station. British bubbles are the next big thing.

Details

Champagne School

● **Searcys** is running monthly Champagne School events at its **St Pancras brasserie**. The next is on June 20. Three sparkling wines and three paired plates for £45pp.
stpancrasbysearcys.co.uk/champagne-school



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Taste the difference: champagne is on the menu at **Searcys**, on the upper concourse at **St Pancras**, above

