

# Finding the right... Contract winemaker



**Albourne** The springboard to success ♦ **Black Chalk** The creative collaborator ♦ **Bolney** The variety performance  
**Defined Wine** The contract-only ♦ **Halfpenny** The small site's saviour ♦ **Itasca** The green dream  
**Litmus** The equipped and experienced ♦ **Stopham** The still white specialist

## Extra acres present industry with big processing challenge



**The acreage of vines planted in recent years is encouraging evidence of the huge optimism in the sector, but it's creating a challenge which the industry is yet to fully address – where do we find the processing capacity?**

According to WineGB chairman Simon Robinson, plantings of about 0.5 million vines in 2016, 1 million in 2017, 1.6 million in 2018 and 3 million in 2019, with the prospect of more in 2020, could result in a “serious shortage” of capacity.

“This potential shortfall has become more obvious over the past couple of years because of the high yields and it will become increasingly so as these new vines come to maturity,” he says.

Faced with this “pinch point”, some wineries will make use of existing spare capacity, others

will expand, some bigger vineyards will build their own facilities and more contract-only businesses will launch, predicts Simon, who owns Hampshire-based Hattingley Valley. “It’s going to become more of a buyers’ market, though.”

For those looking to expand or build new facilities, securing planning permission shouldn’t be considered a fait accompli, with local objections always a potential problem, despite the broadly supportive national government position, he says.

“The extra plantings mean the industry will also face another challenge slightly further down the track which people aren’t yet talking about much – storage capacity. All these extra bottles will require space – and the right sort of space.

“The wine industry is innovative, but in the short term the biggest challenge could be felt by the growers who don’t want – or aren’t able – to have their own processing facilities,” says Simon.

Managing director of Bolney Wine Estate in Sussex, Sam Linter, believes the lack of nationwide capacity could particularly affect farmers diversifying into the sector in search of higher returns, who don’t have the desire or resources to launch a processing operation.

“If they want to sell grapes to brands already making wine, they need to have a clear plan for who they are going to sell to and what varieties those people will want, before they put any vines in the ground. The problem comes when people just assume that they’ll be able to sell the grapes.”



When it comes to choosing the right contract winemaker, it is vital to find someone who shares your vision; someone who you trust wholeheartedly and someone whose wines you admire. Fortunately, just like English and Welsh wine, there is plenty of choice and within this diverse offering there is absolutely no one-size-fits-all policy in sight.

Map of the United Kingdom showing the number of new business registrations in each region for the year ending March 2015. The map uses red pin markers with white circles containing the registration count. London is marked with a black dot and a plus sign. The highest number of registrations is in London (14), followed by the South East (14) and the South West (14). Other regions with high counts include the East of England (12), the Midlands (9), and the North East (7).