

RAISING A GLASS TO ENGLAND'S UNLIKELY BOOM

the rise of English wine

How an English sparkling wine's Best in Show at the world's biggest wine awards points to something bigger — a warming climate, French investment pouring across the Channel, and a wine map that's quietly being redrawn.

C1
BUSINESS
English
Reading



READ

authentic business article



VOCABULARY

12 key C1 business phrases



PRACTISE

comprehension & gap-fill



DISCUSS

real business insights

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson explores England's surprise rise on the world wine stage — from a Best in Show award to French Champagne houses investing across the Channel — and what it reveals about a warming climate and shifting global markets.

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- ✓ Use 12 new business phrases and collocations confidently
- ✓ Discuss the link between climate change and shifting global markets
- ✓ Summarise an argument and evaluate risk versus opportunity

A) WARM UP — DISCUSS BEFORE YOU READ

Do you enjoy wine? If so, do you prefer white, red or rosé?

Is wine a popular drink in your region?

What are your thoughts on British food and drink?

Can you imagine English wine ever becoming popular?

Raising a Glass to England's Unlikely Boom

It is fair to say that Britain's food and drink industry has never really inspired the world — a reputation English people have long defended more out of loyalty than evidence. However, the 2026 Decanter World Wine Awards have handed them an unexpected argument. Could English wine be about to rewrite that reputation — and is the traditional wine map itself **on the verge of** a complete **overhaul**?

At the Decanter World Wine Awards 2026, the world's largest wine competition, an English sparkling wine surprised everyone by winning "Best in Show." It was the second year running that England had claimed the top prize, and this time the prize went to a Balfour Blanc de Blancs from Kent.

Nearly 17,000 wines from 58 countries were tasted by 245 experts. Only fifty wines — 0.3% of entries — were awarded Best in Show. Furthermore, the success didn't stop there for England: four other wines all won medals of their own. One regional chairperson of the competition praised the British wine scene, claiming that English sparkling wine was even **on a par with** French Champagne, describing leading English wines as genuinely interesting and thoughtfully made. A separate Decanter tasting of 66 English sparkling wines rated eleven of them as outstanding.

So could England be **gaining a foothold on** the international wine stage? Decanter claims that global standards in wine are improving every year, and tradition in winemaking **holds a lot of sway** with experts and consumers when choosing which bottle to buy. However, for a country better known for its bland cuisine, England has certainly caught the world's attention.

The numbers point to a huge boom on the English wine scene. England has **stepped up** production by 55% in 2025, producing around 16.5 million bottles — more than triple the 5.3 million bottles made in 2017. Vineyards are now **prevalent** across the whole of the UK, with over 1,100 registered, making the UK the fastest-growing wine region on the planet.

This is no longer just a hobby for rich landowners who can afford to **plough money into** something very likely to **flop**. The industry now employs roughly 10,000 people, and forecasts point to 25–29 million bottles a year by 2032, with the retail value of English and Welsh wine potentially reaching £1bn by 2040.

WINE TERMINOLOGY IN THE ARTICLE

Champagne

A legally protected name — it can only be used for sparkling wine made in the Champagne region of France, using traditional methods. Sparkling wine made anywhere else, however similar, must be called something else (e.g. "English sparkling wine").

Vineyard

An area of land planted with grapevines, grown specifically for winemaking.

Grapevine

The climbing plant on which grapes grow.

KEY PHRASES

to be on the verge of

overhaul

to be on a par with

to gain a foothold on

to hold sway

to step up

KEY NUMBERS

0.3%

Proportion of nearly 17,000 wines awarded Best in Show at DWWA 2026

55%

Rise in English wine production in 2025 alone

1,100+

Registered vineyards now across the UK

It is widely accepted that this boom can be **attributed to** a warming climate. Southern England's soils belong to the same ancient formation as the Champagne region in France, so the soils themselves have always been **on a par with** France in terms of quality — but they were missing the weather. Grapes thrive in warm, sunny days and cool nights that preserve acidity, so for anyone who has ever visited Britain, it will come as no surprise to hear that the warm, sunny days are the part that has been missing.

That is now changing rapidly: average temperatures in southern England have risen to levels similar to Champagne's climate in the 1980s, while the island landscape and closeness to the sea allow for long growing seasons and cool nights that sparkling wine depends on.

The rising temperatures **facilitating** England's wine production are unfortunately **inhibiting** production in the Champagne region itself. 2021 brought devastating spring frosts, which are becoming more **prevalent** across the region, and hail destroys huge areas on a yearly basis. In 2026, Burgundy and Champagne have suffered heatwaves of up to 44°C, leaving harvests **on the verge of** failure. Excessive heat causes grapevines to shut down photosynthesis and dries out the soil, so grapes lose acidity and gain excessive sugar, leading to higher, unbalanced alcohol levels. Climate models suggest that by 2050, up to 85% of Champagne's current vineyard land could become unsuitable for its traditional grape varieties.

This has led to some French wine producers taking extreme measures and offering a further vote of confidence to English wine. Taittinger, one of French Champagne's grandest houses, has **ploughed** £17 million **into** opening vineyards in southern England, launching its English label Domaine Evremond in 2024. Another sophisticated label, Pommery, has spent eight years **gaining a foothold on** the south coast of England, progressing from buying grapes, to buying land, to planting its own grapevines. Since 2018, nearly £480 million has flowed into English wine.

England's rise is not an isolated story. As climate conditions shift, other unlikely regions are on the rise, from China to Wales and even Scandinavia. Whether any of them can translate good reviews into lasting reputations is another question. Wine remains an industry where history and prestige count for as much as what is in the glass, and England's sparkling wines can never legally use the Champagne name that still **holds** most **sway** in the category. So next time you are searching for a good bottle, you know where to look — maybe even pair it with a nice plate of fish and chips.

"It's extremely exciting as it is on the up; the sparklers are every bit as good as most Champagnes and the still wines, once an after-thought, are genuinely interesting and thoughtfully made."

— Simon Field MW, DWWA Regional Chair for England & Wales

MORE KEY PHRASES

to plough (money) into

to flop

to be attributed to

to facilitate

to inhibit

KEY WORDS & PHRASES

to be on the verge of overhaul to be on a par with to gain a foothold on to hold sway to step up
prevalent to plough (money) into to flop to be attributed to to facilitate to inhibit

1 MATCH EACH PHRASE TO ITS DEFINITION, THEN COMPLETE THE EXAMPLE WITH THE CORRECT FORM OF THE WORD.

1. to be very close to a particular state or event, about to happen: _____
We're _____ signing the contract — we're just waiting on legal sign-off.
2. a thorough examination and improvement of something, often involving major changes: _____
The whole onboarding process needs a complete _____.
3. to be equal in standard or quality to something else: _____
Our response times are now _____ our biggest competitors.
4. to establish a first, secure position in a new market or situation: _____
We're finally starting to _____ the Southeast Asian market.
5. to have significant influence over people's opinions or decisions: _____
Brand loyalty still _____ with a lot of our older customers.
6. to increase the amount, intensity, or level of something: _____
We need to _____ production before the holiday season.
7. widespread or common in a particular area or at a particular time: _____
Remote work is far more _____ in our industry than it used to be.
8. to invest a large amount of money into something: _____
The board agreed to _____ another two million into R&D.
9. to fail completely, especially a product or venture: _____
Their last product launch _____ badly and was pulled within a month.
10. to say or believe that something is caused by a particular thing: _____
The delay can be _____ a shortage of raw materials.
11. to make a process or action easier: _____
The new software should _____ faster approvals across departments.
12. to prevent or slow down a process, or hold someone back from doing something: _____
Micromanagement can seriously _____ creativity in a team.

2 ANSWER THE QUESTIONS IN FULL SENTENCES, USING YOUR OWN WORDS WHERE POSSIBLE.

1. According to the article, why is England's Best in Show win at the DWWA 2026 considered statistically significant?

2. What role does climate change play in both England's rise and Champagne's difficulties?

3. How have French Champagne houses responded to changing conditions, and what does this suggest about the future?

4. According to the article, what limits England's ability to fully capitalise on its improving wine quality?

3 GAP FILL — COMPLETE THE TEXT BELOW USING THE CORRECT FORM OF THE KEY WORDS AND PHRASES.

overhaul

to gain a foothold

to hold a lot of sway

to step up

prevalent

to plough into

to flop

to be attributed to

to facilitate

A Tense Meeting About the New Market Entry

"Thank you all for coming. I'll be direct: our expansion into the Nordic market needs a complete (1) _____, because something is not working. When we launched, we were confident we could quickly (2) _____ there due to our reputation in other regions. Six months in, though, growth has been slower than we projected, and the feedback we're getting suggests that loyalty to established local brands still (3) _____ with consumers — people are choosing what they already trust, not what's new. It isn't all bad news. We did (4) _____ our marketing spend significantly last quarter, and to be fair, the early quality issues are now far less (5) _____ than they were. Still, we (6) _____ nearly half a million into setting up the regional office, and I'm not willing to watch that investment (7) _____ without a proper plan in place. Looking at the data more closely, much of the slowdown can be (8) _____ something fairly simple: people just don't know who we are yet. That's a solvable problem. Stronger local partnerships, in my view, would go a long way to (9) _____ faster brand recognition, and that's where I think we should focus our energy next."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you think traditional industries can survive without adapting to change, or is disruption inevitable?

"Prestige matters more than quality in many industries." Do you agree with this statement?

If you were investing in a new consumer product, would you prioritise short-term returns or long-term brand-building?

THE SCENARIO

Your company is considering a serious investment: buying land in southern England, planting a vineyard, and launching a brand-new English sparkling wine label. Before you decide, the board wants a clear-eyed look at the numbers involved.

£16k–20k

per plot of land, cost of a suitable site

£30k–40k

per plot to plant & establish vines

3–5 yrs

before the first proper harvest

8–10 yrs

typical time to profitability

In groups of three or four, take on one of the roles below. Using these figures — and today's key phrases — discuss the benefits and risks of the project from your character's point of view, then work together to reach a group decision.

THE ENTHUSIASTIC FOUNDER

- You believe England is on the verge of a genuine wine boom, backed by back-to-back Best in Show wins.
- Point to French Champagne houses ploughing millions into English land as proof the opportunity is real.
- Argue that waiting too long means competitors gain a foothold first.

THE RISK-AVERSE FINANCE DIRECTOR

- With land alone costing up to £20,000 per plot, and 8–10 years to profitability, this is a slow, expensive bet.
- Frost and hail still affect English vineyards; a single bad harvest could sink the investment before it earns a penny.
- Ask whether the "boom" can be attributed to lasting demand, or just short-term media hype.

THE BRAND STRATEGIST

- Established names like Nyetimber and Chapel Down already hold sway with English wine drinkers.
- Push for a clear point of difference, since the label can never legally be called "Champagne."
- Suggest a phased launch to step up production gradually while the brand builds a reputation.

THE SUSTAINABILITY ADVISOR

- Worried that large-scale planting could inhibit local biodiversity and strain water resources.
- Wants any investment to facilitate long-term environmental care, not just fast returns.
- Warns against a rushed overhaul of land use before proper environmental assessments are complete.

Group task: Once everyone has made their case, decide together — does your company go ahead with the investment? Be ready to present your decision and reasoning to the rest of the class.

USEFUL PHRASES

GIVING YOUR OPINION

"The way I see it, we're on the verge of something significant here."

"From my perspective, this looks risky."

AGREEING

"I agree to some extent, but we would have to plough a lot of money into this in order to see any results."

"Yes, I believe that could facilitate our progress significantly."

DISAGREEING

"I take your point, but I'm afraid I can't really go along with you there."

"Unfortunately, I don't think we could gain a foothold in the industry so quickly."

PERSUADING

"This is exactly the kind of project worth ploughing real money into."

"If we don't act now, someone else will get there first."

REACHING A DECISION

"Let's weigh this up properly before we commit."

"On balance, I'd say the opportunity outweighs the risk."