

# Ep 176: Regenerative Viticulture with Wendy Outhwaite, Co-Founder and Winemaker at Ambriel (Part 2)



**Janina Doyle 00:00:07** Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello wine friends, and welcome back to part two discussing regenerative viticulture. So, I'm delighted to have on the podcast, Wendy Outhwaite, who is the co-founder with her husband Charles of Ambriel Winery, which you can find in West Sussex in England. She also makes the wines. After many decades working as a barrister, decided to plant some vineyards and very soon after realised that actually taking care of the land and the soils is of the utmost importance.

And so, she's going to be taking us on that personal journey discussing using geese in the vineyards that didn't quite work out, how instead of using insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, she's using biological controls.

We'll be talking about dandelions and wildflowers and how they help the vineyard. Of course, we'll end up talking about tilling and hoeing, so you'll understand the difference between the two and hopefully, hear from somebody else what they think regenerative viticulture actually is.

So, go back to part 1 if you've missed that, because that's a great introduction. There also I mention a few wines that focus on regenerative viticulture where you can purchase them from my sponsor's website, [Wickhams Wine](#), link is in the show notes and remember the code to get yourself 10% off your first order is "EATSLEEP10."

There's a transcript for this podcast as always so if we're mentioning names like the spotted wing drosophila, if I'm pronouncing it correctly, we like to call it SWD, you will find that so you can investigate further. And so, pour yourself a glass from a bottle of wine nurtured by someone committed to their land and enjoy the episode.

**Janina Doyle 00:02:24** Wendy, I have to start this podcast asking you, what was it that took you from being a lawyer over to planting a vineyard and making wine? Bit of a change.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:02:37** Well, I don't know. My clerk said it was one bar to another, so it's not that much of a change. I mean, I've always loved wine. And in fact, in the very early days, I tasted some English sparkling wine. In fact, someone had given it to us. And I'm ashamed to say, so ashamed, that we'd put it in a cupboard having said, thank you very much.

**Janina Doyle 00:02:59** No. Were you like, 'Ugh English?'

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:02:24** English wine those days wasn't quite as good as it is now. Anyway, we tasted the sparkling wine. It was utterly fabulous. And I thought it'd be really lovely – we both thought that the only joint venture we'd ever had was our children. So, we thought, why not do something? It's really great to make something tangible that you can share with other people and maybe spread a bit of love and joy. That's what it's all about. So, yeah, that's what we did.

**Janina Doyle 00:03:29** Love that. And so, in terms of working, making the wine at Ambriel, the point of this episode specifically, I want to dig deep. I found it fascinating that you've actually really gone down that more regenerative viticulture approach. And so, when did you actually first plant the first vineyard?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:03:49** 2008.

**Janina Doyle 00:03:49** 2008?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:03:50** Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:03:51** Were you thinking in that way back then or is this something that gradually as you've been planting more vines and making the wine, your mindset has changed across? What's the journey been there?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:04:02** No, I'm afraid I have had a bit of a journey. I mean, I wish that I'd known more when we first started, but I didn't, so I'm not going to pretend. Yeah, I mean, the thing is, your vineyard does actually respond to whatever you do to it. And I feel that we knew very little.

And so, we asked lots of people, lots of questions all the time. And when it didn't add up, we thought England is still a fairly new wine making country, so we don't have that centuries of customer practice and tradition and whatever. In a way, we don't have any baggage.

So, it's a bit of an opportunity to have a look at what we've got, what other people had and what we should do with it. I mean, we're really lucky in England, aren't we, that most of the vineyards – I know there are some diversified farms, but quite a lot of them are planted into virgin land. So, we haven't mucked it up. We've still got a green and pleasant land and we need to just keep it that way. Not to sound smug or complacent, but we're focusing on not wrecking it. So, we're starting at a different point.

And I really noticed, I was looking around vineyards all over the world and you could see the difference between some vineyards and other vineyards. And some vineyards look sterile and they look vulnerable. You feel like you ought to go and protect the vine. And we all know, don't we, that, for instance, when people were sending their rubbish from Paris to the vineyards of Champagne and it was vegetable peelings, fantastic, all was well. But then when it was, doll's heads and smashed up glass, less good.

So, you do realise there's a connection between the health of plants and the soil. And you don't have to be an expert, and I'm certainly not an expert, to realise that that's a bad thing. And then you start thinking about what you can do to be a bit kinder to your vines? What do vines actually like?

I mean, we have a glorious tradition of gardening in this country and you talk to people and they know everything about their garden, but the moment you show them a vine, they think, whoa, that's

totally different. But actually, all those principles are exactly the same, right plant for the right place, where do vines like to grow? They like to grow on the edge of woodlands.

Maybe you ought to think about trees. What sort of soil do they like? What don't they like? They don't like mildew. Those sorts of things. And then, you just adjust your practices accordingly. And part of that is looking at your soil health. And that's really where regenerative viticulture comes to the fore, I think.

**Janina Doyle 00:06:52** This is my definition, the healthier your soil, the better for biodiversity and the environment and the vines and the animals and everything and the ecosystem. And that is basically what regenerative farming or regenerative viticulture is: trying to have your healthier soil. Is that how you would define it as well?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:07:14** Yes and no. I think the most difficult thing about regenerative viticulture or regenerative is defining it because yes, the main focus is absolutely on soil health. The reason why is because unlike other things, I used to think before I was involved in this, biodynamics, that's it, go and do that. Or organics, that will sort out everything.

Then I remember just the shock actually of seeing copper buildup poisoning soils. And we realised that actually you have to think a bit more deeply. And the reason why we go towards regenerative more than any other system is that no one says to you if you're into regenerative viticulture, you have to do A, B, C, D, E, tick those off and tick you get your regenerative-whatever.

It's not the actions that you do. It's the effect that you have. So, what is actually happening to your soil and your soil is really the only thing that you can measure really well to show that the system is working.

Having said that, obviously plants grow in soil, they go up into the air. There's no sort of non-transmissible barrier. Animals, they manure the soil. It goes down into the soil through everything else that's there. So, I don't want to put an arbitrary, it's all about soil and nothing else. I feel that it's a bit grey at the edges. But yes, the main way of checking whether you're having any good impact is by looking at your soil.

**Janina Doyle 00:08:41** Well, okay. Let's then talk about what you are doing to have this impact so people can say, okay, what are the actions? Now you mentioned, first of all, hoeing. Now I always get really confused with hoeing. Obviously, it's almost like a pickaxe and you dig around with the soil, but obviously tilling is really aerating the soil, which is typically not a great thing because you're actually releasing the carbon from the soil back into the atmosphere. So, how does hoeing compare to tilling?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:09:16** Hoeing and tilling are pretty much the same thing. If you're going... if, okay? This isn't mandatory. But where we are, we don't employ any frost protection at all because we're on a south facing slope on green sand. In fact, I brought you, here you go. Here is our rock. And this is our secret weapon.

**Janina Doyle 00:09:35** Now everyone, you can't see it, but it's a nice rock. I'd like to touch the rock. It's a brilliant rock.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:09:43** But what happens is, well, about this time of year actually, in April, when we're coming up to Budburst, even the pale sunlight that we get here warms the rock up and that means that typically we don't get frosted. So, we don't own a bougie, a fan, a heater, a dragon, nothing.

**Janina Doyle 00:10:03** You know what? You are so lucky because I was just adding up – don't ask me why. Yesterday, I just wanted to ask the question of how much does it cost to heat a vineyard? And when a bougie, so if anyone is listening, a big kind of paraffin wax candle typically costs about £8 to £10.

I was thinking about when you have to light enough candles to heat like a five acre vineyard, which is just, for instance, one of the vineyards that we have at Balfour. And it works out, literally it's going to cost anywhere between £8,000 to £10,000 for the candles to do the five acres. And that will last you possibly three, four nights worth, maybe.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:10:47** Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:10:47** Because each candle only lasts three, four nights. Oh, anyway, it's shocking. So, to not have to do that, that expense.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:10:56** Yeah. But there's always a counterbalance, isn't it? So, obviously, we keep the under vine area covered during the winter months because you don't want to find the top of your hill, down at the bottom of your hill.

When it's sort of where the frost might come, when you're coming up to bud burst and whatever, we do clear under the vine. There are two ways of doing that. One is by hoeing or tilling. And the other is you could put down a herbicide. We don't use herbicides. We did and we've decided that's even worse for the soil, so we temporarily clear the under vine with an under vine hoe.

And then once we've got past flowering, actually, we let it all go over again. So, there are times in the year where our soils are clear and just in that little strip underneath the trunks, and it's really a frost protection thing.

**Janina Doyle 00:11:51** But is hoeing a little bit more, you can do it in that small area, whereas tilling, in my head, I'm thinking you're going through with the machine and it's kind of almost like moving the earth.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:12:02** It's a very narrow strip. I mean, frankly, the narrower the better. And also it isn't very deep because obviously, like you said, I mean, in fairness, soil is complicated and I really don't pretend to be an expert on everything that goes in the soil.

And the secret is nobody actually knows. Even the best experts don't pretend that they can comprehensively understand what's going on in the soil, but we do know, don't we, that there are some bacteria that are aerobic or anaerobic.

And so, depending on what your soil is like, getting some air into the soil can help aerobic bacteria, but you don't want to go in there and destroy great tracts of soil because you are literally killing your under soil ecosystem. So yeah, light touch is best.

**Janina Doyle 00:12:54** In every area of life, actually, maybe. Did you say that you've planted wildflowers?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:13:03** Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:13:03** Have you got wildflower meadows? My favourite thing.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:13:05** So around the headlands, we have wildflowers. We haven't taken up all our inter-row spaces because we've got so much growing in the inter-rows, lots of different species that it'd be an act of vandalism.

And embarrassingly, if you go out with your bug nets, what's important is you let whatever's growing in your inter-row. First of all, grow something between your rows, please.

**Janina Doyle 00:13:30** Okay. Number one. Okay.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:13:34** And then when you grow something, let it grow taller, because that's what lets all the different bugs and mammals and birds and whatever go and use it properly. If it's nipped to within a centimetre of its life. So I very often see beautiful, beautiful New Zealand with its, however many billion sheep, and I do sometimes look and I think, wow, that's a really short lawn. And that is maybe less helpful for biodiversity than something that grows longer.

But if you go and get your bug net out and you swipe it through your wildflowers and then you go and swipe it through your grass and whatever else is growing in it, inconveniently you get more bugs in your long grass and actually different sorts of things, so lone wasps or whatever they're called, particularly like grass rather than wildflower.

But wildflowers, apart from looking pretty, give a lot of nectar to a lot of different species. So, I think you just need to always give as much as possible and as varied a diet to everyone – It's a bit like a person. You want to make sure you get all your vitamins and minerals from your veggies. You want a big spectrum of food. You want to look after your gut health just like you want to look after your soil health. You want to be resistant to disease. What's the best way of doing that? Having a variety of everything around you. Vines are exactly the same. All farming is the same.

**Janina Doyle 00:15:01** That sums it up beautifully, doesn't it? And of course we know, for instance, when we take antibiotics, what does the doctor always say? Okay, dose yourself up with lots of vitamin C, eat well because basically, this man-made thing is going to clean up some stuff. It's going to clean up the bad stuff, but it's also going to clean up the good stuff as well, so you're going to need to try and put that back in.

I guess, when you're doing normal sprays, the herbicides and the pesticides that you're spraying over a vineyard, yeah, you're getting rid of the problem, you're also getting rid of all the good stuff and the health and the microbiomes and everything that the vine needs, just like it would be in our body. Yeah.

When you think about it that way, it's a much easier way to understand. I get fascinated with wildflower meadows. I found out that actually you can have grass and great, anything. Grass is better than nothing because it's still taking some carbon out of the atmosphere, which is one of the

major things that we all really need to do. But having wildflowers, they take 80% more carbon out of the atmosphere than grass alone.

So, that's just the immense number that that can do. And of course, like you said, wildflowers have really deep roots. And I would imagine, I don't know if this is true, the more it grows high, I don't know whether the roots then have to go deeper because it needs even more energy. I'm not sure if that's actually...

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:16:26** Well, that's a good point. I mean, they're not glamorous. We have lots of dandelion docks in our vineyard. In fact, the vineyard goes yellow at certain times of the year. And people are often disappointed. They're like, oh, it's just dandelions. I'm thinking, yeah, but dandelions – I mean, they've got those great long tap roots.

So, if you've got any soil compaction from your tractor, it's going to deal with it. And there are also certain things that are good at removing. So for instance, research has been done in Bordeaux about using red clover, in particular, to pick up the copper and take it out of the soil again.

So, if you have been spending a couple of centuries spraying copper – I mean, there's vineyards in Switzerland where the walls of the Clos are absolutely blue because of the copper. It makes you realise just what's in the soil.

**Janina Doyle 00:17:14** I haven't seen that. Okay.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:13:15** I thought the wall was painted blue, but it isn't. It's just copper. But the red clover is meant to particularly take that up. So yeah, flowers are clever.

**Janina Doyle 00:17:26** But then it's not just flowers, I suppose. Again, the idea is you want to have as much biodiversity as possible. So, you've also gone planting trees. More trees, haven't you? Or do they just make that up?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:17:36** Every year we plant some more trees. I look around to see if I've got a bit more space to get just a few more trees in. They're great. I mean, vines are really meant to be with them. And you look, they share the same microbial fungi with each other. They communicate with each other.

I'm not going to trespass on the academic community that is slightly bickering with each other at the moment is exactly what they do but what we do know is that they've lived together for millennia. And it's not just any plant, I suppose, that loses its leaves, that goes down, it rots down, it becomes compost, it becomes part of the soil. We never look at what's happening beneath our feet, but we know that all of life is there.

And so, it's that sort of thing, but it's actually the roots living together. So, if you look at places like Chateau Palmer, for instance, in Margaux. They've actually put trees in the middle of their vineyard because they had heard that the best grapes came from the vines that were close to trees. And obviously, in the olden days, trees were the original trellising. Vines would grow... I haven't put any trees actually in the vineyard rows because it's England. I need light and air.

**Janina Doyle 00:16:54** Precisely, which is interesting because I just read an article for Bordeaux. There's some wineries now that are actually planning this brand new vineyard. In the vineyard

planning, they are going to put trees all across the rows to shade the vines. I know you can see anyway, actually, it's great, as you just mentioned, for biodiversity, but that's their way of tackling global warming, which is really fascinating. We definitely don't want to be doing that right now.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:19:21** Not yet!

**Janina Doyle 00:19:22** Maybe in 50 years time. Oh, my God!

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:19:25** The planet doesn't get that warm for us to have to do that. But yeah, no. Also around the perimeter. And then obviously, quite a lot of these are fruit trees. So, they're very good for early nectar. We love bees, particularly bumblebees. Not honeybees so much because everyone does honeybees. No, honeybees are great. But loads of people do honeybees. Whereas I think bumblebees need a little bit of an extra hand. They do.

**Janina Doyle 00:19:48** Do they?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:19:50** Yeah. They come out earlier. Well, they're not in hives being looked after by people for a start. So, the queen comes out by herself and has to build a whole colony from scratch being out on her own in the cold. So, she just needs a little bit of nectar out there.

So, early nectar from fruit trees. And in fact, our old friend, the dandelions. They are all there for them. Yeah, no, that works very well. So, we like our trees being there. We don't like tree shade but we do like tree involvement, both above and below ground.

**Janina Doyle 00:20:22** And what about animals? Because did you say you used to have geese? Was it geese that were going for the vineyard? They were a disaster. Why? What was the problem with the geese?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:20:32** I got some fabulously beautiful pilgrim geese that are really good. They're used to weed tobacco plants in the States and they are also very effective eaters of slugs and snails, which you don't want on tobacco plants.

So, I thought this is great. And I'd seen the cutest films of geese and ducks and things in South Africa and I thought, yeah, they must be great. Let's buy 60. And luckily, Charles intervened and said, why don't we do a trial with a smaller number and thank goodness, because these geese were great. They did exactly what it said on the tin. They were out there, they were grazing and weeding and I'm sure they're eating whatever they could find, but they're quite territorial geese.

So, they started attacking the people working in the vineyard, and then they started attacking car tires and lorries and whatever. So, we have ponds here as well. So, we moved them down to the pond, but yeah, they weren't great in the vineyard.

But we've tried all sorts of things. We've tried chickens. Sheep obviously, are brilliant. We want to graze sheep all the time and they're excellent. And we've also experimented a little bit with pigs, but you need to have a short snouted pig if you want. So, Kunekune pigs are brilliant in vineyards.

**Janina Doyle 00:21:53** Okay. Going forward is sheep in the winter are your animal go-to to basically presumably nibble away at the weeds, eat and then obviously have a little bit of a poop and give some manure to the soil. Is that kind of the point of the sheep?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:22:11** The point of any animal, I think, is to graze and do a bit of weeding. Again, they've just come out of the vineyard because we need a short cover crop just in case frost comes. And fertilising is always good.

And so, there's a fantastic winery called Antiquam in Oregon, who made a very good point that if you buy an inorganic fertiliser, first of all, you've got to transport it. It's smelly and nasty to touch. And then you have to burn fossil fuels to be able to spread it around your vineyard. And none of that is really great.

When you have as an option, animals that give you nice organic fertiliser, which slow releases, but the lovely thing is they wander about. So, they spread it for you so you don't have to do anything except look after them. And of course, different animals have different diets and therefore have different, both potencies and makeup of their manure. So, one will have more nitrogen, one will have more phosphorus. It's all whatever it needs in the main.

The nice thing about pigs, I must be having to be rude about Noah, I think we should be nice about pigs because what they do, whereas all the others, the chickens, the geese and the sheep, they will definitely nip the top of any plant growing, they'll do your weeding for you but the roots are there. Whereas your little pig will eat the roots. And so, they're very quick at clearing.

So, if ever you've got any problems with stinging nettles or brambles or whatever, the pig is your friend, but don't keep them in the vineyard for too long because they're very good at clearance. They'll quite happily nibble any root, including your vine roots. So, don't leave them there for too long. But if you think about it, pigs are designed to move through woodland and move on. They're not meant to be permanent residents there. So, it should be a cycle rather than a permanent thing.

**Janina Doyle 00:24:10** Well, we just guess what we're trying to do with farming and with viticulture is the circle of life that you're respecting. Everything should be just moving the same way that the vine grows and then it goes back to sleep. The whole cycle.

I'm feeling spiritually connected right now. You talked about manure, right? We've also said soil health, this is great. We want to give good stuff back to the soil. You also do mulching, don't you? Which is obviously fantastic. You're using the vine pruning, so you're actually taking pieces of wood, natural things, and putting it back in the soil. But how do you do that? What is a mulch?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:24:50** A mulch is the same as when you're gardening. It's either for covering the soil so that you stop weeds growing, suppressing weed growth. And then, of course, that rots down, so it conditions the soil as well. But also it helps retain water in the soil.

So, it's particularly good if you've got a very hot summer and you need to maintain your water. You don't want it evaporating and you don't have, if you had any bare earth, that would be bad. So, cover it with a mulch.

So, it's got three functions. And we just use our vineyard – I mean, we do actually use the mulch, which we might talk about later, but we use our vineyard pruning. What we do is we lay them straight in the middle of the rows. I'm giggling because I should have said, I should have warned you about sheep. Sheep do not recognize obstacles.



If you lay a row of straight prunings when sheep are in the vineyard, you will find your prunings distributed everywhere. And then, we literally use a feilmeier and so it chops them into little bits. It goes incredibly fast. I mean, we have a lot of worms in our vineyard. You can't chuck a trowel over them.

**Janina Doyle 00:26:00** I love an earthworm. We love the earthworms.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:26:05** But it does mean that as soon as they see these woody bits of deliciousness that's around, up they come and down it goes. So, you go in thinking, well, where's the mulch? And it's basically like a magic carpet being absorbed back into the soil.

**Janina Doyle 00:26:19** That's fascinating. Wow! Is that the same because you use the grape mark as well? So, the skins, once you've made the wine, some people decide to turn it into brandy, but you're using the skins and that's fantastic as well to go back into the soil. Do you use that the same way?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:26:36** Not immediately. When it's raw. So, if your skins and stalks and seeds, if you just sort of went and lobbed them onto the nearest vine, I think that'd be too raw and acidic. I don't think you'd do it.

So, what we do is we keep the marc and we mix it with wood chips and we leave it for at least three years. You've got to get the worms going through it in its raw state. Worms are the most magical thing. We use all sorts of worms. We had intended to just use tiger worms, but it turns out they invited all their friends, so it's a big wormary.

**Janina Doyle 00:27:14** Worm party!

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:27:15** Yeah. At least three years and then it's good to go. And we saw this in Oregon again, actually, where people had put it. I wondered what the banks were at the side of the vineyard. And it was literally like a lasagna, sort of wood chip and then marc. And then, once it's been left for long enough, it can go back onto the vineyard to condition it. But as you say, it's replacing what you've taken away. Instead of taking the whole time, give back occasionally.

**Janina Doyle 00:27:42** Now, when I was reading about the fact that you do use grape marc, I think you mentioned about vermiculture and then my mind got a bit – I've heard it. I think someone explained it to me once, but I'm like, what's vermiculture?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:27:57** Yeah, that's just me being poncy, isn't it? Because vermiculture is just worms. It's putting worms through something to transform it into a soil conditioner. So, to change it from being an unintegrated, there's a seed, there's a skin, there's some stalks and they're all quite acidic and raw, and changing it into a sort of a more composty-type substance, which actually is good for the soil. Yeah, that's all it is.

**Janina Doyle 00:28:23** Right. So, vermiculture is organising and maintaining your worm party.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:28:30** Yeah. Go worms!

**Janina Doyle 00:28:31** Again, for anyone, you know, you said what they do there, that's great, but they create better drainage in the soils. They help with the soil structure. When I found out

about that – I mean, there's lots of other microorganisms and bugs and things doing things, but I feel like it's the earthworms. It's the worms that are just really the leaders. They're the leaders of this.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:28:56** You can see quite easily. Literally, if you dig up in the vineyard, you can see worms, whereas you're not going to be able to see nematodes. You may not be able to see fungi. Sometimes you can. But they're so obvious and they're the best indicator that all is going well. If you've got a lot of worms, you're okay.

**Janina Doyle 00:29:15** Well, now, sometimes there are indicators that things aren't going so well. And we, sadly, in vineyards have lots of vineyard pests and bugs that we don't like. So, I was reading you can spray, you can spray a whole load of pesticide. That's not going to be very good for the soils or the vines. Or you can work with natural predators to basically eat the vineyard pests that we don't like. So, what do you do? You try and get in, they're called lacewings. You encourage them into the vineyard. How do you do that?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:29:45** Well, you can plant for them. They are like certain plants. If you don't have any lacewings or ladybirds at all actually, you can buy some in the post.

**Janina Doyle 00:29:55** What?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:29:56** But actually, they're really useful because they deal with all sorts of things. So, I did once see some thrips that were eating holes in some vine leaves. And literally, we got some lacewings in and we always have lots of ladybirds anyway. And yeah, they absolutely dealt with it. It was fine. And it's the same with, I mean, people go, we don't use any insecticides at all. We just don't. I don't see the point.

I love it. Although I'm always slightly surprised when one falls on my hand, but I love it when you see a little earwig in the vine somewhere because I know that they eat the eggs of light brown apple moths. So, you sort of think, go there, go clean. That's great.

Our biggest thing, which is all down to actually a lovely guy called Matt Dalton at the Food Standards Agency. He's the guy who put me onto dead-end hosts. You'll remember, a few years ago, we found spotted wing drosophila in the country. SWD. It was worrying because it's got jaws that can go through pinot noir and split into the skins, letting anything get into it, botrytis or worse, acetic acid. You can make fantastic SWD vinegar, but that's not what we're about.

So, what to do? And he was saying that because this is a Japanese fruit fly, and so it's not evolved to deal with our native species. So, we planted around the vineyard, which happened to be bird cherry, but there are lots of tree species that will do it. And they have a sort of a black fruit in September that smells absolutely delicious if you're an SWD. Not so much if you're a human, but there we go.

**Janina Doyle 00:31:42** Oh, I was getting excited then. I was like, I've got to come down and smell it. Okay, no.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:31:45** I know, I mean, it's not a bad smell, but you wouldn't think wow, in the way that they clearly do. Anyway, they go and they lay their eggs rather disgustingly in the fruits. And then when they get eaten by starlings or pigeons, because they're non-native, they can't survive the digestive tract of the bird. And so, that's it. It halts the cycle. The eggs are killed.

**Janina Doyle 00:32:09** Oh, wow. That's fascinating. Because yeah, last year in England, it was probably the worst year ever for this spotted wing. How do you say drosophila?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:32:17** Oh, I don't know. I always do SWD because I'm never quite sure.

**Janina Doyle 00:32:21** How would you pronounce it? It's this Asian fruit fly. Do we know why we're getting this and why it seems to be becoming potentially more of a problem?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:32:31** I mean, it was imported. I mean, it was literally imported on ships and things. Its favourite fruit is cherry and we are surrounded by wild cherries. So, no doubt they think it's the best area.

And last year, you're right, I think there were reports of SWD down even in Devon and Dorset where they hadn't been before. And I think it's because we had a really long season. And do you remember we had late berries coming out from brambles and whatever that they survived on. And so, they were around much more for grapes.

I mean, I don't want to mislead anyone. Do plant dead-end hosts, but you're still going to need to go out there. So, I use apple cider vinegar at the end of the rows. They love it. Apple cider vinegar. Something that they think is slightly fermenting apples, they think is absolutely amazing. So yeah, I'll do that.

And you need to just give it a drop of liquid soap to break the tension of the water so that if they go in and drink, hopefully they'll also start going underneath.

**Janina Doyle 00:33:34** Interesting. Honestly, I just think it's so fascinating when you start paying attention to each individual bug, pest, bird, animal. What do they need? What's been the biggest challenge? Trying to be much more in keeping with the land rather than using commercial agricultural sprays, what has been the biggest challenge?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:33:54** I mean, our site is brilliant, but geologically, it's on top of a hill that's been eroded by wind for millennia, and we're on rock. I mean, that's great for vines. Vines are hardy old things. They've gone down for metres. They're very happy. In fact, ours are quite stocky, chunky. chunky chaps.

But you do think, well, okay, what about my soil? What about the planet? What about everything else? And I have to say, when we started, as I say, it was virgin land, nothing had happened to it. I think maybe some sheep had grazed after the war, but that was about it. And so, there was nothing that had been done to it.

But obviously, we test it. We see how it is every year. And it's been really great having started with something that was quite rocky and quite thin. And to see all the little indicators, not only what's growing in it, you know that there are a billion things living in it.

I'm dismissive about nematodes and whatever, but actually they do a fantastic job. It's just that I can't see them, so they're hardly pets. But it is amazing to see that in a really short period of time, you can positively affect something. It's life enhancing, literally life enhancing.

**Janina Doyle 00:35:17** Amazing. So actually, the work you've put in, you are seeing the results full stop. That's beautiful. That's amazing. And so, healthier soils should indicate healthier vines, which in theory should mean that our fruit is better, meaning that the wine is better.

So, I'm going to open up... Yay! Your bottle of Blanc de Noirs 2016. I didn't open it until this moment because everybody likes to hear a pop. So, we will open it in a moment. I mean, I've tasted several of your wines. Always loved them. You're very patient. You do a lot longer ageing on the lees. Everybody listening, sorry, we're talking about traditional method sparkling wine, not still wine. Is that just because, again, for your quality, a certain style, or just you decided you've got the time?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:36:12** I think England is a fantastic place to grow grapes because you have that really lovely, long growing season. And I always think it's just like Scottish raspberries. Scottish raspberries are the best in the world. And the reason why is that they just ripen really slowly. You don't get this huge spike of sugar and whatever. They just gently take their time. And I think grapes are the same.

And we personally, although we've experimented with malolactic conversion. We tend to avoid it. And if you're going to avoid it, then you need a really long time on the bottle lees, just so everything integrates and mellows. I hope you like this.

**Janina Doyle 00:36:54** Straight away, just sorry, I haven't even tasted it. It's like strawberry cheesecake, everybody. I'm smelling a strawberry cheesecake. It's really fruity. Giving lots of red fruits. Anyway, sorry, carry on. I just want everyone to know I'm enjoying my sniff of strawberry cheesecake.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:37:11** So we tend to leave them on the bottle lees for a bit long. So, that one's had five years on the bottle lees. That particular wine is made, we vinify by clone separately. So, this particular one, I can tell you, is from a pinot clone called 777. It's 98% Pinot Noir, and then there's just a tiny 2% of Pinot Meunier. But it's important that you know that I personally look after the Meunier. So, every little percentage counts.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:37** I love that! Why only 2% of Meunier? Just because you haven't got as much planted? Or what's your reason?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:37:44** We don't have as much planted, but actually for this particular wine, it was really for the nose. Meunier in different places does different things, but our Meunier is much more for the nose and not really for the palate, I find. Yeah, it's just a little seasoning really of the fantastic – I mean, don't tell the others, but 777 is my favourite Pinot Noir clone.

**Janina Doyle 00:38:09** I tasted 777. I've talked about it. I think only on just a few podcasts alone and actually it's a Pinot Noir. I really like the structure. I like the fact that you get really red and darker fruits in this kind of, even like a gravelly. It's a strong burgundy clone. I like it.

This one, I love. The nose is so giving, really fruit driven, but actually on the palate, it's very serious. It's a lot more spice, a lot more savoury tones. Very, very clean. Very, very fresh. So, considering it's had five years on the lees, you might expect something to be really creamy, really mouth filling, but actually it's very, very vibrant.

It's actually got almost like a citrusy zing going through on the palate, but super concentrated on the fruits. But I guess that's because you're not doing malolactic fermentation. So, the acidity is higher in the first place.

And what I do know when I've learned, which I think is fascinating, is that when you don't do it, it means the autolytic flavours actually stay at bay a little bit more. So, you get complexity in a different way rather than that creaminess. So, very crunchy fruit. Lovely, crunchy red apples more on the palate with this spice note going on.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:39:30** It's seven grams per-litre dosage. And actually it's one of those wines very often when we're with students and we're trying to teach them the impact of sugar on the nose rather than the palate, you gradually give some more dosage to say, well, what can you smell?

What I think we're aiming for is I don't want you to just have strawberries. I want you to have everything. I'm just basically greedy. I would like everything in the grape. Yeah, I think don't mask it too much with too much sugar and just let it be itself. And it seems to find its way. But yeah, I mean, Charles and I are very much on the stormtrooper wing of more structured wine. So, it's inevitable that's what you're going to get.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:20** It is. The aromatics are beautiful and the nose, which actually is what we want. We want to smell something and go, yummy. And then when we taste something, we want to go, oh, yes, that's got something going on. And so, it does.

What I really appreciate as well, I really like it, especially with traditional methods of sparkling wine, you have not just put the bottling date, you have put the disgorge date and the dosages on this. You've got the information that's actually important for somebody, for instance, anyone doing their diploma, their WSET or just wine geeks that want to drink a whole load of different sparkling wines.

The disgorge date, everybody, as soon as you actually put the cork in and now you've disgorged and the lees have gone, the wine is going to evolve. It's going to get more dried fruit and honeyed and spices in a way that it didn't before when it was on the lees.

And so, actually when you get a wine and you're like, okay, cool, it's a 2000 vintage or it's a whatever. If you know about that vintage and the climate, maybe it was a warmer climate, so maybe it's going to be richer flavoured, but actually when was it disgorged, how long has it been sat around? Cause time on cork is going to change the exact same wine. So, you could take the same wine, disgorged a year apart and then they'll be really different. Thank you.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:41:41** The frustration. Because also I'm old enough to have seen Fizz when it was going past me, usually wrapped in a napkin. So, you had no idea even what it was. The front label wasn't even on display, let alone any information on the back label. And then when you know a bit about wine and you want to know, and it's so frustrating because it usually – I think the world is changing. I think there's more information, but it used to be, well, if you have to ask, then, you shouldn't know.

But actually I do want to know what the blend is. I do want to know what people have done with it. I mean, I'm just fascinated. I love wine and it's just so much more fun to be able to recognise it. I've done this and I just think it's great. And if we want people to take sparkling wine seriously, and I

think we all should – sparkling wine should be really serious about how you make them. And then they should be really fun.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:33** Really fun.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:42:34** But I think more information is good. And if you're not interested in it, you don't have to read it.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:38** Ignore it.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:42:40** Just pass by.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:40** So, how much does a bottle of this delicious Blanc de Noirs 2016 cost?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:42:47** I think it's about £36. I really wish I'd looked at my website.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:51** That's amazing. Okay, so for everybody listening, it's a tough job. I have to drink a lot of English wine. Working for an English winery, I need to benchmark taste, right? It's a tough job. I have to do it.

I was going to say from tasting this, this should be £45 to £50 a bottle. Don't do it. Don't do that. Don't do that to us. Keep it in the 30. Thank you. Well, that's where I would put it. So, therefore everybody, great value. That's that. And also if anybody's going to Ambriel's website, get the Demi-Sec. Listen, get a load of cakes, Sunday afternoon, friends around crack open the Demi-Sec and that is more than just fun. Isn't it?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:43:37** That's afternoon tea. I mean, seriously, it's a great thing. We made it under sufferance. I blame Johnny Ray. Johnny Ray made me make a Demi-Sec.

**Janina Doyle 00:43:46** Who's Johnny Ray?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:43:47** Johnny Ray is a drinks editor, works for The Spectator, and things like that. He's lovely. Absolutely lovely. Anyway, we might've had a slightly boozy lunch and he came, "Make a Demi-Sec." And I'm ashamed to say that I pulled myself up to my full height and said, no.

By the time he left, we'd agreed to do one riddling crate and we've had to make it ever since and it's been great. I didn't even know that this was a trend, but in the Nordic nations, English afternoon tea has become a bit of a fashionable thing. And so, it goes a lot with it because it's got the structure to go through your smoked salmon sandwich, but with cakes.

**Janina Doyle 00:44:24** Okay. Yes, that's true because your style is not too rich and rounded. Love that. Everybody, if you want beautiful fruits, but you want structure, Ambriel is your friend. Done. Just to finish off and conclude, for everybody, go and check out Ambriel or put the links to the website so you can get to know them more. You're very small and boutique at the moment. How many bottles are you making?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:44:48** 55,000 a year, usually. Yeah, I know.

**Janina Doyle 00:44:53** Yes. Can people come and visit you?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:44:55** Absolutely. We love people. Come and see us.

**Janina Doyle 00:44:58** Do you love people as much as you love animals, trees, vines and soil?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:45:01** Well, obviously trees are better.

**Janina Doyle 00:45:04** Agreed. And are you planning on expanding? Are you going to be planting more vineyards soon? Are you growing or not?

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:45:10** No, we've got more land here, but the vineyard that we've planted exactly fits the winery. Like I said, we've vinify by clone who have lots of different sized tanks, theoretically each clone goes into each tank. That never works out by the way, but that's the theory. And yeah, I think, we're not big for an English producer, but if you compare us to say a Burgundian, we're enormous. So, I think we're just where we want to be, I think.

**Janina Doyle 00:45:37** Beautiful. Thank you, Wendy. I really appreciate that. And you know what I'll be doing this weekend, enjoying, savouring each sip of this absolutely beautiful wine, knowing as well that you made it, knowing where it kind of came from and the care you've taken for the land, which actually just makes it that little bit more special.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:45:55** Well, look, I hope you have a really, really happy birthday.

**Janina Doyle 00:45:58** No. Now everyone knows. April 7th. When you listen to this, everyone, I will be extra old. It'll be a month down the road. But you can also send me gifts and presents. Don't worry. Now you're listening. Send me a message. It's fine.

**Wendy Outhwaite 00:46:10** Thank you so much for having me. It's been a blast.

**Janina Doyle 00:46:14** Well, I'll come and see you very soon. Take care. Bye!

**Janina Doyle 00:46:20** So, I hope that has piqued your interest in different ways to farm the land and take care of vineyards, but also perhaps increased the love for soil. If half of all of our earth species live in the soil, it is definitely something we should know a little bit more about. And especially when 95% of food production relies on our healthy soils. So essentially, the healthier the soils, the healthier we are too.

And so, to finish off with, I have a wine quote and this one is from Jamie Goode, who for anybody wanting to explore this topic more, and especially from that scientific focus, Jamie Goode has released a book called Regenerative Viticulture. And in that book, he says:

“What regenerative viticulture gives you is a toolkit that can be adapted to place, recognising that there is no one size fits all way to farm.”

This is a subject that we can continue learning about. Certainly, Jamie's book, he's planning on doing a new edition when more science comes out, which it will. But for now, I shall leave you guys to explore further.

Next week, I am going to be taking you on a little bit of a journey of the white grapes of Spain. And so, it's not just about albariño or verdejo, godello, maturana, viura, airén. Have you heard of these? So, we're going to definitely be going on a little journey next week.

If you are enjoying these episodes, don't forget to share with your wine loving friends, like them, subscribe, press the bell, take a screenshot, put it on your socials, help spread the word and I will see you back here next Monday, wine friends. Until then, cheers to you!