

50 BEST INDIES



12 VINEYARDS OF SHERBORNE

Another strong entry from the Vineyards crew this year, where the all-female team continues to make waves regarding inclusivity in the world of wine. This was no woke vote, though, with the dynamism of this small company shining through, whether that be the opening of a mezzanine wine lounge area, plus expansion into new premises, or expanding the range by some 250 often eclectic wines – all chosen on blind tasting, for quality alone, with an ever-evolving selection by the glass. It's all about stories here, of people and the wine, with a very strong independent ethos that reaches out to similarly minded businesses and people in the local community.



13 RESERVE WINES (North West Standout)

Now standing at five sites, with three being drink-in hybrids, Kate Goodman's Reserve Wines continues to move

with the times, showing a dynamism that keeps the offer on its toes. A great list of over 1,000 wines and spirits is now increasingly complemented by alternative formats, plus refillable and keg options, with Coravin also now firmly part of the mix. Meanwhile, there's been a push to greater agility to mitigate some of the issues facing merchants, including working with more suppliers to shape and evolve the range, plus investment in stock management tools, while a push sees the online side growing, along with the wholesale. A great all-round operation.



14 LEA & SANDEMAN

Having evolved over time from thrusting young merchant to stalwart of the London scene, always setting and sticking to high standards, whether with the classics or across the board, specialisms such as Italy still very much set the benchmark today. Lea & Sandeman offers all the facets of service and trade that you'd expect from a serious merchant, but everything it does simply oozes professionalism and quality, with staff across its stores having a depth of knowledge as far reaching as the impeccable range of wines.



15 HARPER WELLS

Described as a quiet achiever and hard to fault, this Norfolk-based indie excels on many fronts, with its French-led but broad list offering much to engage. Wine lovers flock here for a mix of enticing extras, too. These cover winemaker tastings, strong sustainable credentials, including keg wines and the use of frugal bottles, projects and tie-ins such as its own sparkling winemaking and partnering with local micro-producer Gutter & Stars, with NFT offers to boot. Meanwhile, canny use of wine concessions and a growing multi-channel business has cemented commercial success across the company.



16 CHILLED & TANNIN (Wales Standout)

If 'bodacious wines with confidence' are your thing, rooted in an ethically and sustainably sourced range of 180 wines, sold with energy, enthusiasm and fun, then Chilled & Tannin delivers in spades, never taking itself too seriously, while breaking down barriers to wine. It's no surprise to find a bio and natural bias here, matched by offers such as 'most sustainable wine case' for eco-delivery, or a growing roster of cans, BIB and wine on tap, along with championing of local Welsh wines, but it's all done very well indeed. The Chilled & Tannin Radio soundtrack to bottles is another nice touch from this quirky iconoclast of a merchant.

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17 TANNERS
A high climber this year, with judges recognising that this multi-sited, Shropshire-rooted merchant continues to quietly do what it does very well indeed, with many strings to this successful and characterful business. The traditional is very good here, but new Chilean, Bulgarian and Algarve listings, along with several exciting small Italian producers, point to the breadth of the portfolio, with English and Welsh wines also being championed. A carbon neutral warehouse is planned, with a carbon neutral target for the company by 2023, and alternative packaging is now part of the deal, all helping grow the customer base by bringing in new and younger drinkers.



19 BUTLERS WINE CELLAR (South East Standout)
Everything a local merchant should be, with Henry Butler and Cassie Gould being immersed in the community, whether that be through impressive charitable works or intimate knowledge of the restaurant

and bar scene, to the point where Butlers feels like part of the gastronomic fabric of Brighton and Hove. The wine selection backs this up too, with Henry readily admitting he buys on passion, with never a dull bottle to be found on the groaning shelves. A lively podcast and enticing social media presence add to the charm.



10 WHALLEY WINE SHOP
The Whalley Wine shop team certainly couldn't be accused of standing still. With Tom Jones's philosophy that they are not trying to reinvent wine retailing, but just do a damn good job of what they do, this small company has opened a wine bar next door, invested in new people, upgraded its website, added a 'chilled wall' of 180 cool wines and opened a much bigger storage facility to help keep stocks up and costs down. There's also a new focus on everyday affordable options and a big push to advance its green credentials.



20 WOODWINTERS
Woodwinters has risen well beyond its roots as a great Scottish indie to become a successful hybrid of three-store merchant and far-reaching wholesaler, with a business now extending down to London and beyond. Driving this growth has been a mix of successfully developing its own strong agency portfolio, plus an ever-increasing roster of wines it imports direct, with a changing list of around 2,000 wines offered at any one time. A dynamic and growing example of what can be achieved with roots in bricks and mortar.

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21 SOUTH DOWNS CELLARS

This Sussex-based merchant is a great all-rounder, with its two shops providing the anchor for a thriving business with a healthy wholesale arm and also online sales. Within the far-reaching 1,800 product range, local is championed too, with some 80 Sussex wines and 200 local craft beers and ciders featured. Meanwhile, as much of the global range as possible is shipped direct, to help keep a keen competitive edge, with a new focus on sub-£10 wines to help customers struggling with the current cost of living. Add in innovative marketing, an engaging regular magazine, plus a healthy focus on staff advancement and wellbeing, and there's much to praise.



22 DEFINE

A founding father of the Vindependents buying group Define may be. But that doesn't stop this Cheshire-based wine shop-come-restaurant indulging in what it describes as 'reckless'

stockholding, packing in original and off-piste finds, not least when it comes to its strengths in South Africa and Italy. Business here is split fairly evenly between retail, wholesale and agency, with online also growing, but it stays rooted in wines chosen precisely because they are a 'hand sell', with stories to tell.



23 BOTTLE APOSTLE (Highest Climber)

The wonderfully named Bottle Apostle is our highest climber this year, singled out by judges for its quality, commitment and integrity, with its four shops offering a hugely compelling portfolio of well-chosen finds to satisfy its local London audiences. Both formal and informal tastings and events form part of the mix here, always with the aim of expanding customers' horizons, while staying honest and independent to the core, and offering true value across the range.



24 KASK

A bright and happy natural-leaning wine oasis, doing what it does well, and also communicating this in an engaging and fun way. The attitude to customers and staff alike is good, with plenty of events to help communicate the wines and their stories, and in-store charcuterie and cheese selections adding to the sense of community and enjoyment at the heart of this Bristol-based business. Strong eco-credentials only add to its standing.



25 HANDFORD

Great knowledge backs a great range here, coupled with great service, with this smart business being hard to fault on any level. South Africa is a particular strength, with strong ranges from Italy and Burgundy too, but with a wide reach in the quality-focused 2,000-strong offering. The team at Handford's London shop boast what they describe as an unashamedly 'old-fashioned' manner in terms of loyalty and personal service to customers, tempering an incredible depth of knowledge with approachability and a mix that wins loyal customers time and again.



26 HENNINGS

A classic family business, engendering enthusiasm and loyalty with staff and customers alike, providing the base to grow well beyond its West Sussex retail stores, with a flourishing wholesale side and a healthy online presence too. A website upgrade for trade customers, the provision of WSET courses and work with the WSTA on the proposed duty changes are just some examples of the multi-faceted nature of Matt Hennings' third-generation family business, which continues to quietly grow.

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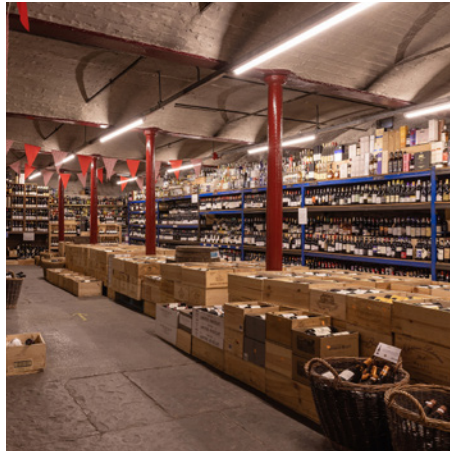
27 THE FARNHAM WINE YARD

Jumping in halfway up our list is newbie The Farnham Wine Yard, only a year old but already one to watch for its clear enthusiasm and verve in its approach to selling wine. A high street hybrid, this funky business isn't afraid of a smattering of recognisable labels, but really hits its stride with its more esoteric and up-and-coming finds. Antipasti platters, a zero-corkage over £50 rule and a great music vibe all make for a hugely compelling place to enjoy wine in an unpretentious way at this rising Surrey star.



20 ADNAMS

A multifaceted company, born of its roots in the wider Adnams brewing and hospitality group, but all the better for that, with its strong community ethos, plus focus on staff welfare, both of which link to an impressive sustainability drive. The drinks portfolio is very strong too, with a growing line of quality-focused and good value own-label wines and spirits (and, obviously, beers), adding to the sense that this Suffolk stalwart is also still an energetic and forward-looking pioneer.



20 D BYRNE

With its 8,000 wines and spirits covering everything from sub-£10 to £1,000 plus, the depth of range in this Lancashire treasure trove of wine is nothing short of phenomenal. Never showy and perhaps deliberately a tad 'old school', delivering oodles of charm for any wine lover, D Byrne has, however, moved with the times. There's been a recent website upgrade, investment in new warehousing to help with the cornucopia of stock, and compelling tastings for customers, including its annual food and wine festival. Simply put, a wonderful place to shop for wine.



30 CARRUTHERS & KENT

(North East Standout)

Our north east standout is an enterprising outfit, small enough to be flexible and innovative, while thinking big. California and Italy are current strengths, but a planned new Enoteca is to focus on eastern European wines, along with natural and orange finds, while a revamped and good-looking website is helping bring it all to life. Add in the deli element, local food merchant collaborations and initiatives like the Bon Viveur book club too, which bridge the foodie side of life, and this inspiring vinous outpost continues to thrive.

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21 JAMES NICHOLSON (Northern Island Standout)

A beacon of excellence in Northern Ireland for many years, as comfortable with Pétrus and Shafer as with sub-£10 Chileans, and now benefiting over mainland merchants with less red tape in its dealings with the world. A leading NI indie, James Nicholson manages to import, wholesale and retail with aplomb, always with an eye on quality and affordability, delivering many strengths to its portfolio, with Spain, Portugal and Italy particularly to the fore.



22 YAPP BROTHERS

In business for more than 50 years, the name Yapp is now synonymous with high-quality regional French wines, buoyed by a philosophy of focusing on 'best in class' wines from often under-championed regions. In more recent years, that philosophy has extended to

wines from Australia, Spain, Germany, South Africa and Argentina as the Wiltshire merchant continues to expand its range. This indie is also increasingly organic and sustainability minded, with more than 20% of the range now organic certified, plus a good number certified biodynamic, alongside a move towards to almost entirely plastic-free packaging.



23 HIGHBURY VINTNERS

North London can lay claim to being the wine merchant capital of the UK, and Highbury Vintners is something of a vino landmark in this part of the world. Customers frequently laud the breadth, depth and quality of the 2,200-strong range of wines, spirits and beers. But while retail remains very much at its heart, this shop supports a multi-faceted business, ranging from strong online sales, to on-trade accounts, en primeur offers, a wine club, wine storage, and a regular roster of tastings and events. In the past 12 months, Highbury has invested in its website to improve the checkout experience and offers flexible delivery windows as people return to the office, while introducing zero-emissions delivery, reducing the carbon footprint for the business and customers alike.



24 THE VINEKING

With the aim of turning down the volume on the 'excess noise' in the wine trade, Surrey's The Vineking continues to win over fans with its no

nonsense approach to retail. Newcomers and seasoned oenophiles find plenty to love about this indie, whether that be its friendly staff at one of its three shops or dropping into its Weybridge Wine Lounge. This is a business that continues to prove it's an agile and exciting operator, where customers can variously expect to find tasting events, wine bar nights and pop-up restaurants happening throughout the week.



25 AMPS

A traditional family-run merchant, Amps has two stores to its name, one laid out by style and the other by country, to account for the different ways customers like to shop for their wines. On the wholesale side, this indie now produces exclusive labels for its best-selling wines, which are written and made in house. With just 12 permanent members of staff, Amps is adept at working in partnership with other merchants to ensure they are shipping in the most competitive way, whether that be via the Vindependents or privately with others.

26 ELLIS WHARTON WINES

With one of the largest retail wine selections in Cornwall, Ellis Wharton Wines has proven itself to be a great asset to the area's vinous retail landscape after expanding operations from a mainly distribution-focused model in 2020. Now with a large shop and warehouse to back its ambitions, in 2022 the business has demonstrated it has the flair, flexibility and determination to run a successful customer-facing business, while adapting its customer service ethos to Cornwall's wine-loving crowd.

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37 SALUT WINES

Self-titled as 'Manchester's finest independent wine shop', Salut boasts a range of 400 dynamic wines to take away, 40 of which are available to enjoy by the glass in-store, poured via state-of-the-art Enomatic machines. As you might expect from a business with one foot firmly in the on-trade, customer service is at the very core of Salut, and converts have also raved about the online tastings Sara Saunby and her team have hosted, replicating the relaxed and friendly in-store atmosphere online.



39 NOVEL WINES

Novel by name, novel by nature, this Bath-based business continues to live up to its own hype with a roster of wines which excite the curious drinker. Central and eastern Europe sit in the portfolio alongside a slew of other emerging wine regions, with the adventurous nature of many – some as far flung as Canada, Brazil and Thailand – meaning that the business has a thriving online shop, too. Most of the wines sit within the £10-20 bracket – hardly surprising, given their niche nature. Still, the business continually manages to delight customers from all wine backgrounds and persuasions, whether they are looking to try something new or complement their favourite classics with something quite different.



40 THEATRE OF WINE

From hand-picked classics to exotic finds from emerging regions, this merchant has it all and backs this up with a tirelessly accessible approach to engagement, delivering sommelier grade level customer service. You are as likely to find new natural stars as classed growths, or hidden gems of Tuscany alongside new-wave Xinomavro. The business continues to convert to digital where possible, focusing on environmentally sustainable delivery options, such as local bike deliveries. Theatre of Wine also partners with a number of recycling companies, continuing to ramp up its green credentials.

40 SAXTYS

Fiercely independent, Saxtys has made its name by offering the good people of Hereford access to the kinds of wines which are under-represented in an area largely dominated by supermarkets. Saxtys' range is broad, too, with trade taking place not only in its shop and via wholesale to the area's top restaurants and bars, but also online. This includes a subsidiary specialist website selling port and fortified wines under The Cotswold Port Company. Overall, an operation made of many talents and parts.

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41 TAURUS
 Housed in a beautifully restored barn on a farm on the Surrey Hills, an EU-registered Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, this merchant offers the whole indie deal. Taurus has a strong ethos of sourcing direct from 'classic regions', underpinning the mix of retail and fast ramped-up online sales, plus a highly active wine school and great sustainable approach. In July 2022, the business took on a 3,000sq ft unit at Dunsfold Airfield – the original home of *Top Gear*. This will allow Taurus to offer fine wine storage and carry more stock to smooth out the current shipping issues.



42 CAVISTE
 With multiple shops, a website and a growing exclusivity-focused import business, the question is, what does Caviste not do well? The business has a compelling offer across retail, both in store and online, with a standalone website in the offing for its

Spirits Room – a relatively new feature which has quickly grown a compelling range of whiskies, brandies, mezcal, tequila, calvados and gins direct from distilleries. A team of expert staff complete the picture, with events like the company's Oyster & Champagne Festival all adding to the business's enjoyably dynamic footprint.

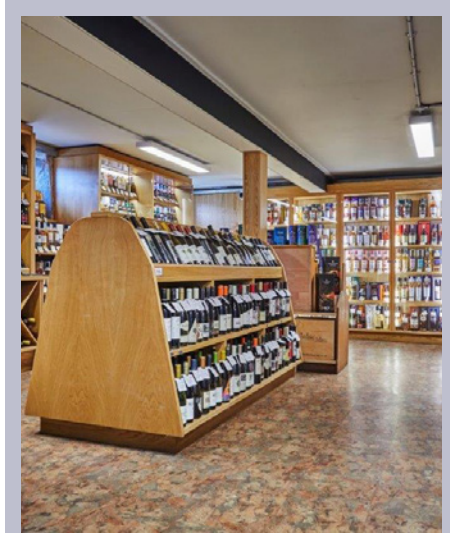


43 OLD CHAPEL CELLARS
 This trailblazing merchant was the first in the UK to certify as B Corp – the most rigorous environmental and social responsibility audit of all accreditations. Under the Cornwall Wine Centre banner, Old Chapel runs a busy WSET app for the local hospitality industry and has enjoyed double-digit growth in the past 12 months across the entire business. Not only that, but this merchant works with some of the most prestigious clients in Cornwall, such as Paul Ainsworth at No.6, Adam Handling's Ugly Butterfly, the Pig at Harlyn, St Enodoc Hotel and Nancarrow Farm.



44 VINO WINES
 Proud Edinburgh-based indie Vino Wines has been an indomitable force on the Scottish wine scene since it first opened its doors 12 years ago. Since then, the business has become a must-visit destination for both locals and tourists, with a portfolio that has grown into a

curiosity cabinet of often esoteric gems, such as Macedonian reds and Brazilian whites. All of this is brought together by the passion of Scottish oenophile extraordinaire Andrew Lundy, who has continued to push the envelope over the past few years, most recently by installing a number of Enomatic machines, thus giving customers greater access to all those off-the-beaten-track wines.



45 FIELD & FAWCETT
 Situated on the east side of York, Field & Fawcett is a popular regional wine merchant and deli that supplies both wholesale and retail. One of the key strengths of the business is the depth and range of the portfolio. This merchant has more than 1,500 wines from long-established wine-producing countries such as France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, as well as wines from lesser-known regions such as Georgia, Bulgaria and Slovenia. However, its specialisms are undoubtedly in Italy and New Zealand, which together account for 450 wines in the overall portfolio.

46 PHILGLAS & SWIGGOTT
 With one shop and wine bar nestled between the hubbub of Oxford Street's shopping district and Marylebone's dining scene, and another long-term site in Clapham Junction, Philglas & Swiggott has not only one, but two plum locations to its name. However, it isn't just where the business operates that has made it a regular on our list. This merchant is well known for hitting the right note between elegance and relaxation in these venues, where customers can peruse an in-depth list, often topping 600 very well-chosen wines.

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47 GRAPE MINDS
After opening its second shop in 2021, Grape Minds has developed a loyal following in Oxfordshire, and for good reason. With strengths in fine wine, Grape Minds imports over a third of the bottles it sells, and works with a very broad range of suppliers to ensure there are no shelf-fillers: every bottle is chosen because the team love it. This indie has also recently opened a bonded warehouse to handle imports, to operate alongside its commercial warehouse in Oxford, which ensures stock is available even if haulage is problematic. In 2023 Grape Minds plans to be a primary investor in a new wine bar opening in Summertown, acting as the sole supplier, adding a new source of revenue, while continuing to engage with its surrounds.

49 CORK & CASK
Super small and very independent, Cork & Cask is the kind of dedicated business that not only works within, but tirelessly for, its local community. Pure passion for the product and love for the area it serves has grown this merchant from a neighbourhood craft beer and wine shop, created by owner Chris Mitchell in 2013, to the operation it is today. This has been further uplifted by the joining of India Parry-Williams, who injected her passion for natural wine, and Jamie Dawson, as wine and spirits buyer, with a keen interest in sustainable farming. As well as a great list, this local indie is understandably well known in its Edinburgh surrounds for its in-store tastings, which have just been added back into the mix, including free sessions for the students and young parents who are a key part of the local population.



40 TIVOLI
Based in Cheltenham with a strong focus on wine education, this small merchant boasts a 30-seat tasting room above its shop, with 32 wines available via Enomatic. With over 700 wines on its shelves, Tivoli has a truly global offering, but with English and Welsh wines a key staple, accounting for 120 of the overall range. During English Wine Week, the business held one of the largest English and Welsh wine events in the south west, showcasing over 90 wines to 195 guests. Tivoli's specialism is its multi-format approach to wine education, running monthly 'mini-festivals' at an affordable price with the aim of introducing new styles and regions to its customers.



50 MILL HILL WINES
For nearly 40 years, the staff at this wine and whisky specialist have been quietly serving the residents of Mill Hill in north London and the surrounding areas. As well as offering a huge selection of wine, spirits, craft beers and cigars – including more than 200 whiskies – this is another business which gives back to the community it serves, with sponsorship going to the Mill Hill Rugby team, youth football league, charity and local school events and the Mill Hill music festival, while offering a standout mix of wines and spirits.

SPONSORS

