

## The cool hotel guide

### The English Wine Centre, Alfriston

It seemed too good to be true. First, there were restaurants-with-rooms. Now, I discovered, there appeared to be wine centres-with-rooms. I drove down the M23, and across the A27, full of anticipation, ready to try the finest wines available to England — and then go for a snooze afterwards.

The English Wine Centre, in East Sussex, is run by Colin Munday and his wife Christine, who have turned their hands to the splendid idea of “wine rooms”, which opened last month. Since buying the centre, which had been quietly selling domestic wines from a little shop in a flint barn, the couple have refurbished the 200-year-old structure, adding a stylish restaurant and five designer rooms.

The result is rather wonderful. The first thing that struck me was the pretty setting. The gardens around the crunchy-new gravel drive have been landscaped by Roger Platts, the Chelsea Flower Show award-winning gardener. There are cute



The English Wine Centre and its oriental-style garden

fountains, oriental-style yards and neat lawns at the back (near another old barn, converted for weddings), amid bright beds of pink and white roses.

Past a gurgling fountain, I entered the Green Oak Barn, a modern version of a traditional Sussex barn, where I found myself in a large room with a small bar and wallpaper printed with books. “We haven’t quite finished down here,” Colin said. “We’re going to sort this out soon.” The rooms upstairs varied in size, some with

baths, some with showers. Mine had a wide bed, plush grey carpet (which seemed very expensive), curtains with a floral pattern and a modern impressionist painting of the countryside. It smelt new. It was big. There were low-slung armchairs and stone lamps. The bathroom sink was enormous, lined with fancy Baylis & Harding toiletries.

It was a perfect pad to slink back to after enjoying a meal — and, of course, a decent drop or two. So, in a restaurant with a low

ceiling and crooked, whitewashed walls, I set to Sussex beef steak, mushroom and English red wine pie, accompanied by an Oxford Regatta red recommended by Alison, the waitress, who has a degree in winemaking.

Prices — there was also fresh-dressed Cromer crab and sea bream — were about £10 for a main. After eating, I checked out shelf upon shelf of English wines in the shop. I had no idea there were so many.

I bought a pinot noir from Wickham Vineyard in Hampshire, Colin’s favourite English red. It was smooth, light and just right for a summer’s evening. I sat in the garden with a book and a glass, revelling in this wine centre-with-rooms concept, before retiring to my own smart room.

**Tom Chesshyre**

Need to know

**The English Wine Centre** (01323 870164, englishwine.co.uk), Alfriston Road, East Sussex BN26 5QS. B&B doubles from £135.

**Room** 7.5 out of 10

**Service** 9

**Food** 8

**Value** 9

**Cool factor** 7.5

**Score** 8.2

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