The World Wine Map: A 2020s Upheaval

Born of Warming: Producers from Unexpected Regions

Five stories that won global recognition in the 2020s



INTRODUCTION

What counts as “highly rated” here

This time the regions are not restricted. Wherever they are in the world, these are producers who used warming as a tailwind and established their reputation in the 2020s.



A reputation made in the 2020s

Producers chosen because international awards and critical acclaim became conspicuous specifically in the 2020s.



A clear link to warming

The growers themselves or specialists explicitly connect rising temperatures to expanding suitable land or better ripeness.



Any region, anywhere in the world

Old World or New, these are places once written off as climatically impossible that now produce a bottle of world class.

BACKGROUND

Why “unexpected regions” are drawing attention now

An analysis by research teams including France’s National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE), published in Nature Reviews Earth & Environment, is redrawing the future of the world’s wine regions.

Harvest is 2–3 weeks earlier

Across the world’s major regions, harvest now comes an average of two to three weeks earlier than forty years ago.

90% of traditional regions at a crossroads

If warming passes 2°C, around 90% of coastal and low-lying traditional regions — Spain, Italy, southern California among them — could cease to be economically viable.

Land that had “nothing to do with wine” takes the stage

Meanwhile Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Tasmania and British Columbia — places with no history of winemaking — are emerging as newly suitable ground.

OVERVIEW

Five places on the map, five shifts in reputation



1 **England, United Kingdom**

Nyetimber (sparkling)

2 **Ahr Valley, Germany**

Meyer-Näkel (Pinot Noir)

3 **Nova Scotia, Canada**

Benjamin Bridge (sparkling)

4 **Tasmania, Australia**

Tolpuddle Vineyard

5 **Limburg, Belgium**

Clos d'Opleeuw (Chardonnay)

OVERVIEW

Five producers, five stories at a glance

1	**Nyetimber** *Blanc de Blancs (England, UK)*	2025: the first wine from outside Champagne ever named IWC Champion Sparkling Wine
2	**Meyer-Näkel** *Spätburgunder (Ahr Valley, Germany)*	A northern red now spoken of as “Burgundy class”
3	**Benjamin Bridge** *Méthode Classique (Nova Scotia, Canada)*	Atlantic sparkling wine born of the tides and of warming
4	**Tolpuddle Vineyard** *Chardonnay & Pinot Noir (Tasmania, Australia)*	Twenty trophies in just ten vintages
5	**Clos d’Opleeuw** *Chardonnay (Limburg, Belgium)*	Mistaken for Puligny-Montrachet by a leading critic in a blind tasting

PRODUCER 01 — ENGLAND, UNITED KINGDOM

The English sparkling wine that fooled Champagne in a blind tasting

In 1988, when growing wine grapes in England was thought merely eccentric, a single vine went into the ground. Thirty-odd years on, warming has turned this island into a sparkling wine region on a par with Champagne.

Finding the same chalk soil as Champagne

In 1986 the Moss family bought farmland in Sussex. Soil analysis showed the same chalk as the Champagne region, and Pinot Noir and other vines were planted in 1988.

Suitable land has moved 200 miles north

With rising temperatures, the ideal ground for sparkling wine is said to be shifting roughly 200 miles north-west of Champagne, into southern England.

Champagne itself has landed in Britain

In 2017, with climate change in mind, the great house Taittinger opened its own vineyard, Domaine Evremond, in Kent. The first vintage was released in 2024.

2025

The year Nyetimber became the first producer from outside Champagne ever to win “Champion Sparkling Wine” at the International Wine Challenge (IWC), scoring 97 points.

PRODUCER 02 — AHR VALLEY, GERMANY

A northern red wine region now called “Burgundy class”

Northern German reds were once dismissed as merely light and pale. Fuller ripeness driven by warming has put the Ahr Valley’s Spätburgunder (Pinot Noir) up for serious international assessment.



1980s

When the Meyer-Näkel family brought in Burgundian clones and French winemaking and began their quality revolution. The critic Tamlyn Currin has since called it “one of Germany’s most outstanding Spätburgunders”.



Learning from Burgundy, chasing quality

Pioneers such as Meyer-Näkel and Jean Stodden adopted Burgundian clones and techniques while pursuing a character of their own.



Warming brought ripeness weeks earlier

Rising temperatures now ripen the fruit weeks earlier than for the previous generation. Dry, sunny days and cool nights hold acidity while building complexity.



The same climate change brought the tragedy of 2021

In July 2021 record rainfall flooded the Ahr, and many producers lost vineyards and cellars. Benefit and threat are two sides of one coin.

PRODUCER 03 — NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

An east coast written off as “unsuitable” becomes a sparkling wine star

The Bay of Fundy is known for the greatest tides in the Atlantic. Its singular climate, together with a growing season lengthened by warming, opened new possibilities on land once thought too hard to farm.

A climate of its own, made by Fundy’s tides

Among the largest tides on earth moderate local temperatures and stretch the season enough to keep harvesting from October into November — the key to the high acidity sparkling wine needs.

“Thanks to climate change”, critics agree

The leading critic Jancis Robinson attributes the rise of Nova Scotia’s wine industry to “climate change and better viticultural knowledge”.

A solid reputation in Britain and the USA

Annual production of the brut is small, around 10,000 bottles, yet it has built acclaim and demand well beyond Canada, in the UK and the USA.

1999

The year Benjamin Bridge was founded in the Gaspereau Valley, Nova Scotia. It hired a winemaker from the Champagne house Piper-Heidsieck and set out to make sparkling wine.

PRODUCER 04 — TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

As the mainland overheats, a southern island offers the ground

While mainland Australia's major regions struggle with heat, the island state of Tasmania to the south is in the spotlight as newly ideal growing country. In 2011 one venture staked everything on it.



20

Trophies won by Tolpuddle Vineyard in just ten vintages — built steadily while entering as few shows as possible.



Taking over a vineyard planted in 1988, near Hobart

Michael Hill Smith MW and Martin Shaw, co-owners of Shaw + Smith, acquired it in 2011. The vineyard had been established in 1988 by Dr Tony Jordan and others.



Treating cool-climate acidity as an asset

They frame the striking acidity of a severe cool climate as character rather than weakness, and make wine from just two varieties: Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.



The leap shown by the 2020 vintage

The Chardonnay drew praise early, while the Pinot Noir needed time; critics called the 2020 vintage a "dramatic step forward".

PRODUCER 05 — LIMBURG, BELGIUM

A northern white mistaken for Puligny-Montrachet

Belgium was unknown as a wine country. Then in 2007 a Chardonnay fooled the palate of a famous critic, and the world caught a glimpse of what it could do.

Even a master took it for Burgundy

In 2007 the critic Jancis Robinson tasted the Clos d'Opleeuw Chardonnay blind and has said she took it for Puligny-Montrachet.

A quiet turn into a "wine country" in the 2020s

At the 2025 Gault & Millau awards, 27 Belgian wines were honoured. The number of producers also rose 11% year on year in 2024.

Spring frost: the risk alongside the gift

Early budburst also means greater exposure to late frost. Frost damage in April 2024 cut the harvest from three million litres the previous year to one million.

30°C

A summer high that is no longer unusual in Belgium. Warming now lets the grapes ripen fully, to around 13.5% alcohol.

TIMELINE

Five stories on a single timeline

1985 — Meyer-Näkel begins its quality revolution

1988 — Nyetimber's first planting

1999 — Benjamin Bridge Founded

2007 — Clos d'Opleeuw mistaken for Burgundy

2011 — Tolpuddle Vineyard acquired

2021 — Record flooding in the Ahr Valley

2025 — Nyetimber's first-ever IWC win

In forty years, land where growing at all was a gamble has turned into regions that draw the attention of the world.

COMMON PATTERNS

What the five stories share



A “disadvantage” became “suitable land”

Land that was too cool, or where growing was a challenge in itself, has moved closer to ideal conditions as temperatures rose.



Technology transferred from other regions

Winemakers out of Champagne; clones out of Burgundy. Importing the knowledge of traditional regions lifted quality in one step.



“Proof” in a blind tasting

A master mistakes it for Burgundy or Champagne. In a field where judgement tends to be subjective, that moment of objective proof built the reputation.



Benefit and threat are two sides of one coin

Flood, late frost: the same climate change that brings the benefit carries new risks with it.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

Not all of it is a gift from warming

“The rise of unexpected regions” makes an attractive story, but it should not be oversimplified. In practice there are several caveats.



Warming is not the only reason

Producers in the Finger Lakes, USA, say the improvement in their reds owes “less to climate change than to a shift in growing philosophy”. The reasons for better quality are not uniform.



The gift arrives packaged with risk

Flooding in the Ahr, late frost in Belgium. The same rise in temperature that ripens the fruit is also raising the risk of extreme weather and disease.



No guarantee of staying “suitable”

Today’s tailwind may turn into a headwind if warming goes further. The current acclaim is only one point in a long process of change.

COMPARING THE WINES

Five glasses, five characters

Wine	Grape variety	Character
Nyetimber Blanc de Blancs	Chardonnay	Citrus and chamomile, juicy acidity and a chalky finish. The delicate bottle that scored 97 points.
Meyer-Näkel Spätburgunder	Pinot Noir	Complex, Burgundy-like aromas balanced by the clear acidity that cool nights protect.
Benjamin Bridge Méthode Classique	Chardonnay / Pinot Noir, etc.	High acidity raised by sea air, and a fine bead from the long growing season.
Tolpuddle Chardonnay & Pinot Noir	Chardonnay / Pinot Noir	Striking acidity gives a frame built for long ageing, with the tension only a cool climate brings.
Clos d'Opleeuw Chardonnay	Chardonnay	A balance of minerality and refined fruit that recalls white Burgundy.

CLOSING

The map is still being redrawn

The chalk of England, the steep slopes of the Ahr, the tides of Fundy, the cool island of Tasmania, the vineyards of Belgium. Every one was land called “unsuitable for wine” a few decades ago. The world wine map is being redrawn at this very moment. Next time you pick up a glass, the region on the label may carry a story of change as well.

“A map of wine regions is a record of climate itself.”



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This deck was prepared for a general audience using publicly available information.