

A toast to English wine

The English Wine Centre has a great restaurant and new boutique rooms, and is an ideal base for exploring Sussex's vineyards, says Simon Burnton

The English Wine Centre has a slightly misleading title. They have a few vines growing in an out-of-the-way corner, but no wine is actually made here. It is in a great position for a tour of the vineyards of this part of East Sussex - Carr Taylor, Ridgeview and Breaky Bottom are all nearby - which the centre can organise, and with the wine harvest imminent now is a great time to go. Otherwise, the centre could change the word "centre" to "shop" and make everything a bit clearer.

But it is, to be fair, a particularly good shop. Better still, attached to the shop is a particularly good restaurant. Both are relentlessly Anglocentric - they don't serve wine from anywhere else. And the food has an even more local flavour: the fish was landed at Hastings, while cheesecake is flavoured with lavender from the garden. And



PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS CALDICOTT

**Top shop ...
the English
Wine Centre**

though they let crème brûlée on to the menu, it goes under its local title of "burnt cream".

Prices in the shop are perhaps a little high, but diners get a great deal: accompany your meal with anything they stock (140 English wines) and pay just £5 more than the retail price - a tiny mark-up. Alternatively Colin, the engaging co-owner-cum-waiter, will match wine to your food for a flat £3.50 a glass (and you can try before you commit). The food is simple and excellent, but beware: while it's open daily for lunch, dinner is served only on Fridays and Saturdays. It's a shame some residents of their new five-bedroom hotel, Green Oak Barn, will have to stagger further at the end of the evening than down the short gravel path that connects it to the restaurant.

Though care has been taken to make

Green Oak Barn blend in with the older structures around it, the hotel is brand new. The beds are comfortable, the rooms well put together, the showers powerful and the noise from the adjacent A27 almost totally excluded. And if driving's not your thing, the EWC is a pleasant 15-minute stroll from Berwick station, with direct services to London.

There's room for further improvement - breakfast has yet to benefit from the attention to detail that made dinner so impressive, but this would make a good base for a tour of the Sussex vineyards.

● *Alfriston Road, East Sussex (01323 870164, englishwine.co.uk). Doubles from £135 per night. Visit [Sussex \(visitsussex.org\)](http://Sussexvisitsussex.org) is launching a new Vineyard & Microbrewery Trail and also has details of the county's many autumn food festivals*

