

Interview for Vini-Culture, Gusbourne Wine Estate magazine
January 2024
Harry Cragoe, The Gallivant- owner

Happiness is a place... The Gallivant

To mark our partnership with East Sussex hotel The Gallivant, we speak with its erudite founder, Harry Cragoe.

Gallivant: verb, informal – “to go around from one place to another in the pursuit of pleasure or entertainment”

The Gallivant, East Sussex – a beautiful home-from-home boutique hotel on the edge of Camber Sands.

—

The Gallivant’s founder, Harry Cragoe, is an entrepreneur with a purpose. He’s on a mission to spark moments of joy and happiness through hospitality.

It’s a path he chose, more or less, because of a hazelnut roulade.

As a youngster, Harry was alive to the special kind of alchemy created by combining good food and good company. His parents were keen hosts and dinner parties were a regular feature. “My early memories are of happiness created over a dining table,” says Harry.

“When I was about 11 years old, I made a hazelnut roulade for a party; I snuck underneath the table and heard the guests saying, ‘Oh my word, this is so delicious.’ I remember thinking, ‘I made this’. I connected with the simple idea that delicious food creates happiness. It has stuck with me to this day.”

Nothing but fruit

Harry’s work life has taken him across the globe and into many different businesses – all of which are united by this idea of sparking happiness. “In the late 1980s, I was living in California and came across smoothies. I knew nothing about FMCG goods, but couldn’t believe how something so good for you was so delicious too – it was just crushed fruit. So, on a trip back to England, noticing how all you could buy was fizzy pop, I decided to start a business.

“I came back and started Pete & Johnny Smoothies with a friend. It’s difficult to imagine now but, at the time, no one knew what a smoothie was. I spent all day walking into grocery stores in central London convincing owners that their customers would love it. To cut a long story short, 10 years later we were selling 100,000 bottles a week.”

It was time to move on. Harry sold PJ Smoothies and jumped at a fresh opportunity – one which gave him the chance to break into hospitality. “I invested in a hotel business,” says Harry. “One of the hotels was in Camber and the beach was just extraordinary. It reminded me of the Pacific Coast.” Harry could sense the potential in this special part of the world.

A place on the beach

It took several years – and a lot of trial and error – to find the perfect recipe for The Gallivant, but at the heart of the business is a lesson learned from his smoothie company. “What I liked about smoothies,” Harry says, “was that you could see an actual physical change in people when they tried them for the first time. They were uplifted for a moment. When you get a hotel or restaurant right, you have an opportunity to do that for far longer.

“The hotel business is all about creating happiness. You have a privileged period of time where you can keep trying to create more happiness with your guests. And Camber Sands is all about happiness.”

It’s a fine philosophy, but the exciting thing is seeing it translate into the experience of being a guest at The Gallivant.

Warm, generous and genuine

“For the past five or six years, I’ve been obsessed with making The Gallivant something special. Key to this is finding great people who share that passion of creating happiness. I became really fixated on building a happy team, and so we reward our people based on how happy they make our guests.

“It’s about going above and beyond; delighting people in ways which they wouldn’t necessarily expect. I’m really obsessed with customer experience, I basically wanted to create a hotel that my wife and I would want to stay in, somewhere that felt warm, generous, genuine – a place you could totally relax and switch off.”

A brilliant example of this is Harry’s approach to the least loved part of a hotel break: settling the bill at the end of your stay. “I came up with the idea of The Complete Gallivant,” says Harry. “We bundle up everything you might want which you buy in advance, and on departure you’re just paying for any little extras.

“It gives us room to create more moments of happiness: there’s the notion of doing things that people aren’t expecting; little surprises; acts of generosity. Things that are designed to create pleasure because they’re mindful and considered, not necessarily expected.”

Putting English wine in the spotlight

Beyond this mission to create happiness, what is it that sets The Gallivant apart? “A lot of it simply comes down to my wife and I thinking, ‘If we were staying here, what would be a nice thing to happen now?’” This translates to generously piled platters of crisp Kent apples; bowls of nibbles that thoughtfully appear at your elbow in the sitting room; the chef coming out at supper and talking to you about what’s come into the kitchen; yoga classes on the beach in the mornings or a glass of English sparkling wine at 5pm... Which brings us to Gusbourne.

“Years ago, I realised that the English wine scene was really going to explode,” says Harry. “I went to meet Gusbourne’s founder, Andrew Weeber – this mission-obsessed South African who was determined that English wine was going to be something. He was insanely

passionate and very focused. He inspired me to believe English wine was going to be big,” says Harry.

“I returned to The Gallivant and thought ‘what could I do right away to support English wine’? I decided then and there, much to everyone’s disbelief, to delist every Champagne, Prosecco and Spanish Cava from our wine list and simultaneously list six English sparkling wines. The feedback was incredible. People were telling us they never realised how good English sparkling wine was.”

This response was a weathervane: Harry recognised he was on to something, and went all in. “I thought if we’re going to get behind this, we need to be bold and confident about it. So I tried 100-plus English wines and listed 40 of them. Then we started ‘English Wine At Five’. When you come and stay with us, one of the moments of happiness is to gather in the sitting room where we pour everyone a glass of English wine. It brings everyone together, creates more happiness in the house.”

The Gallivant, Harry explains, has introduced more than 100,000 people to English wine over the years. Plus, geographically, it’s a gateway to English wine, sitting in the finest wine-producing area in the country.

“I just think English wine is incredibly good. As a nation, we’re not very good at celebrating amazing area-specific English food and drink. And we should be – we’ve got a lot to be proud of. And the wines are just getting better and better.

“I’m slightly biased, but I do think Gusbourne’s Blanc de Blancs is spectacular. In a blind tasting, if you put that up alongside a Taittinger Comte de Champagne, I think people would be hard pushed to discern the difference, especially if you’re talking about a vintage with a bit of bottle age.”

The Gallivant x Gusbourne

This year, Harry is taking his commitment to English wine even further: “Together with Gusbourne, we’ve exclusively partnered to create a number of tailored Gallivant x Gusbourne wine tour packages. I’m super excited about it,” says Harry.

“Located only twenty minutes from Gusbourne, the secret is to make it as easy as possible for our guests. They won’t have to lift a finger; we’ll take care of everything. A lovely car to pick you up from the station or take you from ours to the Gusbourne Estate; a private tour and wine tasting. And then, back at The Gallivant, English Wine at Five, a delicious dinner and a sumptuous bed to collapse into. What could be better?” What, indeed.

If you’d like to experience Harry’s happiness-boosting hospitality for yourself, then The Gallivant’s warm, cheerful and sincere welcome awaits.

You can find out more about The Gallivant’s wine packages [here](#). As a friend of Gusbourne, you can benefit from an exclusive preferential rate by using code at GUSJAN when you book your visit.