



*Hoffnung*

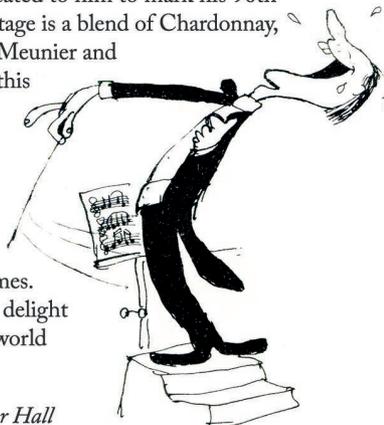
## CUVÉE GERARD HOFFNUNG

GERARD HOFFNUNG was an artist, cartoonist, musician, tuba player, broadcaster, raconteur, prison visitor and humourist who created brilliant and absurd drawings, mostly on a musical theme.

GERARD was a dear friend of the Hall family and this cuvée is dedicated to him to mark his 90th birthday. The 2009 vintage is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier and won a Gold Medal at this year's International Wine Challenge.

He accomplished in his brief 34 years achievements to fill a whole series of lifetimes. His work continues to delight audiences around the world nearly sixty years after his death.

*Peter Hall*



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The wine is available from the vineyard by appointment. Local suppliers include: Butlers Wine Cellar, The English Wine Center, Harveys of Lewes, Middle Farm, Quaff Fine Wines and Symposium Fine Wines.



Photo of Peter Hall by Lizzie Lower

## Breaky Bottom

*Fizz Valley*

"People were living in Breaky Bottom long before I did," says Peter Hall, nestled into the couch in the kitchen of the farmstead he lives in, showing me some flint hand-axes he has found on his land, one of which was fashioned some 300,000 years ago.

He's the first person, however, who thought of growing vines there, which he has been doing for 41 years. The sparkling Brut he produces – 20,000 bottles in a good year – takes the ancient name of the valley it's produced in, and it's premium-end stuff. The valley in question is a stunningly beautiful one, just west of Northease, accessible by a meandering concreted track which takes us through a flock of ewes and a succession of puddles.

I ask Peter about the beginning of his venture, in 1974, when there were only a dozen vineyards in the country. I soon realise that I'm not going to get a linear response, as he starts his story way before he moved to Sussex (I learn of his agricultural education at Newcastle University, and a red MG 1946 sports car) and veers off on wild tangents (hence the axes).

His wife Christine occasionally attempts to keep him on track, but often herself gets involved in the anecdotes, generally of the madcap variety. About, for example, the operas he used to organise, in the flint barn, with up to 250 spectators sitting on hay-bales, including enthused broadsheet critics. About Nigel Kennedy playing an Irish jig to an audience of piglets. About a succession of eccentric relatives and family friends, after whom he names his vintages,

including the 19th-century Japonophile Lafcadio Hearn and a former au pair called Francine.

Occasionally I get what I was originally after. Peter's maternal grandfather was French, and ran a famous restaurant in Soho before WW1: Peter inherited a love of fine wines, which gave him the idea of converting what was originally a livestock farm into a vineyard. He sought advice, and got it, learning on the job, within three years producing a still, dry, white wine made from Seyval Blanc grapes.

He's not a believer in mass production, happier to produce limited quantities of high quality produce from well-tended grapes. His Eureka moment came 20 years ago, when he decided to start producing *sparkling* wine. "We're basically in the Paris Basin here," he says; "the soil and climate is almost exactly the same as in the Champagne region."

Despite problems with flooding, and grape-eating pheasants, Breaky Bottom has been a great success: I learn how the wine was served to the Queen on her Jubilee, why it's popular in Japan (though you can buy it in Harveys, and Waitrose, and Symposium) and - he's humble about this - how it's won international awards. As I get up to leave the farmstead, three hours after I arrive, the cat comes in with a valedictory gift of a dead mouse, and Peter tells it off, in French. At that point I wonder, slightly dizzily, how I'm going to fit everything he's told me onto a page. *Alex Leith*

[breakybottom.co.uk](http://breakybottom.co.uk)