

Sandford Orchards

olive meets Barny Butterfield, the Devon farmer behind the traditional cider that took gold at this year's CAMRA National Cider and Perry Championships

Words CAROLINE SHAW Photograph JASON INGRAM



HOW ETHICAL IS SANDFORD ORCHARDS?

Organic? Because of the age of the orchards, the farm is currently in organic conversion but will be fully certified by next year.

Food miles? Low. All apples come from farms around Crediton, Devon.

Carbon footprint? Low. Spent apples from pressing are used to feed the stock on the farm.

Sandford Orchards cider is available at various Devon pubs, shops and wine merchants, as well as at Exeter's weekly farmers' market. It is also served at Platform restaurant (platformse1.co.uk) in London, where Barny is a stakeholder. Sandfordorchards.co.uk

'I've always looked like a farmer. I grew up in the countryside and although I did try a career in the media, I couldn't resist the call of the blue skies and green fields. I went back to the Devon farm I worked on as a teenager, where they pioneered organic methods, before setting up on my own.

'I couldn't afford to go to the pub as often as I wanted, so I started making cider at home. We had an existing orchard on the farm and I also asked the local farmers if I could collect the unused apples from theirs, as they were just being left to rot.

'My first batch of cider was great, because the blueprint recipe was already in the trees. The local orchards, although tired and old, were hardy and planted centuries ago by people who knew what they were doing. Over the years we have restored them and now maintain 11 old-fashioned orchards, as well as planting a further 20 acres on our farm.

'Cider is all about the apples, the process is straight forward. With good apples there's no need to muck about with the basics. We harvest 50 traditional varieties, such as Devon's own Yarlinton Mill, Pig's Nose and Kirton Fair. These are never sprayed and are only collected when they're ready to fall in autumn. Then we use traditional methods to press the juice and slow fermentation to get the best flavour.

'I think good cider is a treat to be enjoyed like fine wine. Unlike the commercial stuff, ours has character and depth because we take our time and use a mix of bitter, sweet and sharp cider apples. We produce three traditional, still ciders, including a vintage that is matured in rum casks, three carbonated ciders, and have recently introduced apple juices. We are now at a stage where we can produce cider in large quantities, so can supply businesses who want quality, interesting cider made from 100% apple juice.'