

75 surefire reds for the holidays

1 Dec 2007 by FT but this is a rather longer version

Below are my favourite reds available in the UK by the single bottle chosen from thousands tasted over the past three months. They are listed in ascending price order with UK stockists and alcohol levels.

Bordeaux, especially 2005, offers some great value at present while the southern Rhône is benefiting from a run of thoroughly satisfying vintages. The weak dollar has helped the price of some California and Oregon wines.

I have used the following abbreviations:

BBR *Berry Bros*
C&B *Corney & Barrow*
M&S *Marks & Spencer*
SVS *Stone, Vine & Sun*

Los Nucos Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 Colchagua

£3.99 M&S

13.5% Sweet and, for the moment, fresh. Not bad at all considering the price. From Viña Luis Felipe Edwards.

Canaletto Pinot Noir 2006 IGT Pavia

£4.99 Tesco

12.5% Good idea to harness some of the Pinot Noir grown in Lombardy for spumante and make a fresh, fragrant light red from it.

Ch Le Fregne 2005 Bordeaux

£5.49 Majestic

14% Great freshness and still some chew but at the two- bottle price of £4.99 this knocks spots off many a traditional merchant's house claret.

Ch Capelle 2005 Ste- Foy- Bordeaux

£5.50 SVS

13% Excellent value Merlot, not yet quite ready.

Tesco Finest Médoc 2005

£5.98 selected Tesco

13% Very ordinary label belies the quality, and potential, here from Yvon Mau

Finca Flichman, Gestos Malbec 2006 Mendoza

£5.99 Majestic

13.5% Lots of beef here and an attractive savoury finish, from Andean vineyards.

Verhaeghe, Heritage du Cèdre 2005 Cahors

£6.11 Caves de Pyrène

13% A second wine from Ch du Cèdre. Lighter than most but good value.

Agramont Crianza 2004 Navarra

£6.24 Majestic

13.5% Cabernet and Tempranillo combine to produce a dense cocktail of fully ripe fruit. Odd price.

Dom Joel Delaunay, Gamay 2005 Touraine

£6.50 Jeroboams

12% Positively jumping up and down with freshness and fruit. Absolutely delicious.

Mas Carlot Rouge, Grenache/ Syrah 2006 Vin de Pays d'Oc

£6.65 Jeroboams

13.5% Terrific value as usual from this producer. Characterful, balanced and fresh. Good value. Juicy but not simple.

Dom des Bacchantes 2006 Côtes du Rhône

£6.95 SVS

14% BIG! Sweet, funky, not remotely industrial.

Ch du Monthyl 2003 Médoc

£6.99 Majestic

12.5% Price down to £5.99 if two bottles are bought – and why not? The lesser 2003s can make great drinking already.

Porcupine Ridge Syrah/ Viognier 2006 Western Cape

£6.99 Majestic

14% Succulent mouthful of flattering fruit designed to be drunk this minute. Peppery Syrah rather than New World Shiraz.

Dourthe Barrel Select 2005 St- Emilion

£7.49 (until 11 Dec usually £9.99) Waitrose, £8.99 Tesco

13% Exceptional value for a St- Emilion from this blessed vintage. Some delicacy but no shortage of ripe Merlot.

Santa Duc, Les Plans 2004 Vin de Pays de Vaucluse

£7.50 Vinoteca of London EC1

13.5% Really authentic wine from one of the powerhouses of Gigondas that is already great fun to drink.

Pasolini dall'Onda 2005 Chianti

£7.65 C&B

Real tang and life. A wine that cries out for food.

Willunga 100 Grenache 2005 McLaren Vale

£7.99 selected Sainsbury

14.5% No shy retiring violet but a sweet, juicy yet chewy southern hemisphere rendition of the Châteauneuf grape. Underpriced in my view, and I don't often write that.

Montsant Old Vine Garnacha 2004 Montsant

£7.99 M&S

14% Dense, dry, uncompromising wine that truly represents the traditional character of century- old Grenache vines here on the outskirts of fashionable Priorat. **Tesco's version** at £6.99 is tamer. **Laurona** (£16.95 at BBR) seriously fine.

Wrattonbully Vineyards Tempranillo 2006 Wratonbully

£7.99 M&S

14% Very mellow and interesting from north of Coonawarra. Big impact even if not very strongly Tempranillo.

Jean- Luc Colombo 2006 Crozes- Hermitage

£7.99 (from £11.99) until 11 Dec Waitrose

Excellent full- on northern Rhône at the special price.

Cellier des Dauphins, Cru des Côtes du Rhône 2005 Vinsobres

£7.99 Sainsbury

14% Pretty ordinary label but real guts and masses of true southern Rhône spicy herby character.

Dom Charles Joguet, Les Petites Roches 2006 Chinon

£8.35 Waitrose

13.6% Super soft and fruity Cabernet Franc showing off the Loire quality revolution – and climate change.

SAAM Heldersig Pinotage/ Viognier 2006 Paarl

£8.95 Bibendum and The Vineyard of Bury

14% The superior red bottling from a new South African producer that seems to be doing everything right.

Churchill Estates 2005 Douro

£8.99 Majestic

13.5% Very dark, thick and fiery – one of the better Douro table wines from a port house. Good balance and not too sweet – real claret build.

Pirie South Pinot Noir 2005 Tasmania

£9.95 Jeroboams

13.5% Sweet, slightly toffeed red fruit on the nose but deliciously fresh on the palate. Silky fine and fresh.

Mas du Soleilla, Les Chailles 2005 La Clape, Coteaux du Languedoc

£9.95 SVS

14% From a newish producer making a big impact. Very easy and rewarding yet clean. Like daube in a bottle.

Ch Sénéjac 1999 Haut Médoc

£9.99 Majestic

12.5% A really great buy for classic claret lovers – a cru bourgeois at the peak of its (relatively modest) powers. Much better value than Majestic's Ducru Beaucaillou 1999 at £55.

Marananga Dam 2005 Barossa Valley

£9.99 M&S

Another of Britain's wine bargains, in quite a different idiom. Rich, characterful Rhône blend from Torbreck's cache of ancient Barossa vine stumps. M&S also have a little of **The Factor** at £65 but it needs ages yet.

Montes Alpha Syrah 2005 Colchagua

£9.99 selected Tesco, £12.87 Christopher Piper Wines

14.5% Satisfying wine that tastes as though it was matured in sweet burgundy barrels but with a lovely dry, refreshing finish.

Syrah 2005 Central Coast

£11 M&S

13.5% Screwcapped Rhône blend from the first Rhône Ranger Randall Grahm of Bonny Doon. Dark, supple and succulent, well assembled.

Cape Mentelle Cabernet/ Merlot 2005 Margaret River

£11.99 Tesco Fine Wine

14% A Western Australian classic at a very fair price that will only improve in bottle.

Fattoria Casaloste 2004 Chianti Classico

£12.85 Jeroboams

13.5% Spicy and smoky black cherry. Very pure Tuscan fruit. Refined and classy.

Moulin d'Angludet 2004 Margaux

£12.99 until 12 Dec (from £17.99) Waitrose

The second wine of Ch d'Angludet. Good value at the reduced price.

Tesco Finest Yarra Valley Pinot Noir 2006 Yarra Valley

£12.99 selected Tesco

13.4% Very superior Australian answer to red burgundy, made by someone who has made his fair share of the former.

d'Arenberg Derelict Vineyard Grenache 2004 McLaren Vale, South Australia

£12.99 Bibendum, The Sampler of London N1 and Australian Wines Online

15% 100% Grenache. Sweet and round and juicy. Minerally. Some freshness too.

Cline Cellars, Ancient Vine Mourvèdre 2005 Contra Costa, California

£13.50 Tanners

14.5% Mid crimson, pretty ripe and voluptuous. Easy to like. Not OTT. Good spicy cocktail.

Altair, Sideral 2003 Cachapoal, Chile

£13.95 SVS

Rich and very lively blend of Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah from this joint venture between the Dassaults of St-Emilion and Viña San Pedro of Chile, at a better price than it used to be.

Qupé Syrah 2004 Central Coast

£13.95 The Wright Wine Company, £14.99 Whole Foods

Sweet undertow but very approachable.

L'Esprit du Chevalier 2003 Pessac- Léognan

£13.99 Majestic

13% Lively, fresh and lovely. The more delicate sort of red bordeaux but ethereally harmonious and appetising. To be served with relatively plain food – roast chicken?

Ch Musar 2000 Bekaa Valley

£13.99 selected Tesco and Sainsbury, £15.99 Harrogate Fine Wines

13.5% No shortage of comfort from this particularly fresh vintage of an old favourite from the Lebanon.

Bois du Pied Redon 2006 Châteauneuf- du- Pape Rouge

£13.99 M&S

14.5% Extraordinarily succulent and already enjoyable for such a young wine. Organic. Well done, Ogier. M&S's **Dom des Sénéchaux 2005** at £17 is rich and even more satisfying.

Tenuta di Castiglioni 2005 IGT Toscana

£13.99 Tesco Fine Wine

13.5% Luscious, complete Supertuscan blend of Cabernet and Sangiovese from Frescobaldi.

Ch Lagrave- Martillac 2004 Pessac- Léognan

£14.50 (£29.95 a magnum) SVS

12.5% Round, sleek and not expensive. Could already be drunk though better to keep it.

Dom Chevalier, Clou d'Orge 2005 Ladoix- Serrigny Premier Cru

£14.99 Majestic

Good value Côte d'Or red from a useful, organically cultivated domaine in an unfashionable commune that tends to fall in the centrefold between Côtes de Nuits and Beaune. The village **Ladoix** is also a good buy at £11.99.

Dom Pierre Gonon 2004 St- Joseph Rouge

£15.50 Vine Trail

13% Brilliant crimson and lovely pure northern Rhône Syrah scent. Very fine tannins and a refreshing expression of this grape in its homeland already very approachable. A roast chicken red.

Les Terrasses 2005 Alvaro Palacios, Priorat

£15.85 C&B (**2004** is £17.99 at big Waitrose branches)

The (relatively) easy- drinking wine from the young king of Priorat. More refined than it used to be.

Frankland Estate, Olmo's Reward 2003 Frankland River, Western Australia

£16.75 BBR

14% Quite thick and sweet and dense. Well balanced with some evolution. Complete. No eucalyptus. Screwcap.

Dom Alain Maume, Les Terraces de Montmirail 2005 Gigondas

£16.99 (comes down to £11.33 in their 3 for 2 offer) Wine Rack

14.5% Dark and smoky, classic southern Rhône - good slug of Syrah in here.

Hawksburn Terrace Pinot Noir 2006 Central Otago, New Zealand
£17.49 Bibendum, Source Food Stores, The Vineyard of Bury, £18.99 Whole Foods
14.5% Made by Matt Douglas, ex Bibendum business manager now at Mt Difficulty. Sweet and juicy, impossible to dislike. Slightly dry end.

Ridge, York Creek Zinfandel 2003 Santa Cruz
£17.99 D Byrne & Co, £19.99 Noble Green Wines,
14% Spiced by 16% Petite Sirah. Full bodied and marvellously eloquent somehow. Very lively.

Ch Moulinet 2004 Pomerol
£18 selected M&S
Ripe, velvety and slightly dusty Pomerol for traditionalists at a good price.

Rémi Rollin, Fichots Premier Cru 2004 Pernand- Vergelesses
£18.50 Tanners
Pale, very slightly grey. Quite intense and pure. Very fresh. Good with food now. Real lift though slightly severe. Refined rather than opulent.

Dom Vincent Paris, Granit 30° 2005 Cornas
£18.95 Jeroboams
13% Dense dark smoky fruit. Ripe but fresh. Terrific fruit freshness and concentration. Just delicious. Very juicy, fresh and firm but beautifully ripe tannins.

Dom du Ferrand 2004 Châteauneuf- du- Pape Rouge
£18.95 Vine Trail
14.5% Big and beefy but with a good core of fruit. Ideally wait a year or two for the tannins to subside, or perhaps enjoy now with a bison steak.

Le Cupole di Trinoro 2004 IGT Toscana
£18.95 C&B
14% Merlot- dominated Bordeaux blend for early drinking from a protected valley 700 m up in southern Tuscany. No shortage of character.

Dry Creek Vineyard, Somers Ranch Zinfandel 2004 Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma
£18.99 Bibendum, Bacchanalia, Whole Foods
13.5% 98% Zinfandel and 2% Petite Sirah from a Zinfandel hotspot. Real power but none of that hot berry/ jammy flavour.

Dom Frédéric Magnien. Vieilles Vignes 2004 Chambolle- Musigny
£19.85 Domaine Direct of London N1
13% Lovely mature, sensuous Chambolle nose, heady and truffey, and beautiful delicacy on the palate.

Dom Robert Arnoux 2005 Nuits St Georges
£19.99 Majestic, £26 Howard Ripley
Great to find real burgundy from a top domaine in a wine warehouse – so much more exciting than many of Majestic's red burgundies.

Pago de Carravajas Crianza 2004 Ribera del Duero
£19.99 Majestic
13% A little Cabernet and Merlot in this black, thick sweet but well balanced lively and punchy blend from a reliable address.

Dom Drouhin Pinot Noir 2005 Willamette Valley, Oregon
£19.99 Noble Green Wines, Upton Wines
Lovely subtlety, ready, long.

Mount Edward Pinot Noir 2005 Central Otago
£21 Jeroboams
13.5% Lightly smoked and spiced with delicate but ripe red fruit underneath. Smart, classy Pinot.

H Brunier et Fils, Dom du Vieux Télégraphe 2003 Châteauneuf- du- Pape
£21.70 Tanners
Very luscious, curranty, not too dry.

Les Tourelles de Longueville 2003 Pauillac
£21.95 Bentalls, Caviste, Bibendum, £23.99 Whole Foods
13% Very, very ripe and fleshy. Well disguised dry tannins. Fresh. The second wine of Ch Pichon Longueville.

Craiglee Shiraz 2004 Victoria
£22 BBR
14.5% A really individual Australian. Sweet and thick and dense. Succulent and toasty with a proven track record for ageing beautifully.

Napanook 2000 Napa Valley
£22.99 C&B
14% Profit from the weak dollar and enjoy Christian Moueix's second wine of Dominus. Full sweet scented, very easy. Seamless with slightly dusty notes.

Jorge Moreira, Poeira 2004 Douro
£24 Butlers Wine Cellar, Harrods
14.5% Full, rich, heady, ambitious.

Wirra Wirra, Deadringer Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 South Australia
£25 Waitrose (limited stock)
14.5% A fifth of the grapes came from Coonawarra which has added rigour to the McLaren Vale flesh. Biodynamic, screwcap.

Pintia 2002 Toro
£25 Five Reasons Wine, £28 Green and Blue
Very different from the opulent sweetness of most Toro. Already rich on nose yet restrained and tight finish.

Georges Roumier 2004 Chambolle- Musigny
£25.90 Tanners
Pale rose colour. Intense, lots of acid, very fresh and correct. Could drink now.

Dom de la Vougeraie, Les Petits Noizons 2005 Pommard
£31 Waitrose
13.65% From an over- performing domaine. This will continue to improve in bottle.

Next week - whites.