

Greatest buys - strong and sweet

19 Dec 2009 by Jancis Robinson/ FT

This is the prime time of the year for indulging in wines that are strong and/ or sweet, the treats we tend to deny ourselves the rest of the year, to the chagrin of producers in Jerez, Oporto, Funchal, Sauternes *et al.* I have grouped these by style and then upwards by price per cl. (Many of these wines come in bottles smaller than the standard 75 cl size. If no size is specified, it is 75 cl.) For international stockists, see www.wine-searcher.com. Alcohol levels vary widely.

And if madeira is something of a mystery to you, or even if it isn't, I strongly recommend the seriously useful table on matching specific [madeiras with food](#), compiled by Barbeito's UK importer, Danny Cameron of Raymond Reynolds. Perfect wines for the chilly weather we are currently experiencing in Europe.

STRONG AND DRY

Sainsbury's, Taste the Difference Dry Amontillado NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry 17+ Drink 2009-12

From Lustau, the usual ridiculous price for a 12- year- old wine. We must take advantage of these bargains! Bone dry and pale and restrained. Very delicate. A real insider's wine - so interesting and flattering. Fresh with wonderful purity. 19%
£6.49 per 50cl Sainsbury's 345 stores

Emilio Lustau, Dry Old Palo Cortado NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry 17 Drink 2009-11

Unusual nutty, smoky dry style with more guts than the Amontillado above. Super refreshing before a meal. Great with clear soup or nuts and cheese. 19%
£7.49 per 37.5cl selected M&S stores

González Byass, Apostoles Palo Cortado VORS NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry 17.5 Drink now

Intense dark, burnt toffee nose. Walnut coloured and flavoured. Almost bitter in its walnut savouriness. Glorious length and complexity. 30 years old! 20%
£14.99 per 37.5cl Majestic

Equipo Navazos, No 10 Manzanilla Pasada NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry 19 Drink 2009-10

A connoisseur's selection to change anyone's mind about sherry - super dry, the ultimate aperitif. This is a Chevalier- Montravel of a wine. At a Puligny village price.
£23.45 Gauntleys of Nottingham, £28 Theatre of Wine, £29.99 The Sampler

SWEET

Sainsbury's NV Muscat de St- Jean- de- Minervois 15.5 Drink 2009-10

Grown in the mountains for a big Narbonne outfit. Masses of alcohol and sugar rather than grape and vineyard expression, easy stuff and certainly very good value if you have fond memories of Muscat de Beaumes- de- Venise. 15%
£4.29 per 37.5cl Sainsbury's 487 stores

Ch Haut- Bernasse, Le Clos 2005 Monbazillac 15.5 Drink 2008-10

Far from the subtlest sweet wine you will drink, but a good price for a whole handsome bottle of golden grape syrup. Would stand up to many a dessert. 12.5%
£12.45 Haynes Hanson & Clark

Errázuriz, Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc 2007 Casablanca Valley 15.5 Drink 2009-11

Relatively light, fresh, lightly botrytised wine from one of Chile's cooler regions. Green- almond flavours for those who find Sauternes too heavy? Best sipped without food.
11.5%
£7.25 per 37.5cl Stone, Vine & Sun, £7.99 Taurus Wines

Ch Gaudrelle, Réserve Spéciale 2006 Vouvray 17 Drink 2009-16

A classic from the Loire Valley - much more refreshing than Sauternes, with baked apple flavours and revitalising acidity. 12.67%
£8.29 per 37.5cl Waitrose Wine Direct and 174 stores

D'Arenberg, The Noble Mud Pie 2008 Adelaide 17 Drink 2009-12

Heady, syrupy stuff with some raciness. Noble rot and interesting. Fresh and it has a story to tell. Hotter nose than the very tangy palate. Very sweet blend of Viognier, Pinot Gris, Marsanne. 8.5%
£10.99 per 37.5cl Oddbins

Waitrose 2005 Sauternes 17+ Drink 2009-15

AXA- owned top Sauternes property Ch Suduiraut has been very active in selling special lesser blends to UK retailers. This is a great buy with intense honeyed apricots and classic almond and apricot sweetness. 13.93%
£10.99 per 37.5cl Waitrose Wine Direct and 211 stores

Castelnaud de Suduiraut 2006 Sauternes 16.5 Drink 2009-14

Another blend from Ch Suduiraut. Virtually all- Semillon this time. Intense orange and almond botrytis nose. Viscous, barley sugar in liquid form. Delightful rather than complex.
14%
£11.99 per 37.5cl Majestic

Tamar Ridge, Kayena Vineyard Limited Release Botrytis Riesling 2006 Tasmania 17 Drink 2009-12

From the island where all Aussie winemakers may eventually go to escape the heat. Intensely pure citrus. Sweetness and purity balanced by the clear acidity. 8%
£13.49 per 37.5cl Waitrose Wine Direct and 3 stores

Mullineux, Straw Wine 2008 Swartland 17.5 Drink 2009-13

Delicious tarte tatin juice with great tang, made from air- dried Chenin Blanc grapes from old South African bushvines. Not a bad price for the quality. 10.5%
£14.95 per 37.5cl Jeroboams, £14.99 The Sampler

Mount Horrocks, Cordon Cut Riesling 2008 Clare Valley 18 Drink 2009-18

A South Australian variant on a German classic made by half- drying the grapes on the vine. Great precision. 11%
£14.99 per 37.5cl from Virgin Wines, and many others

Grati Fattorie di Galiga e Vetrice, Vin Santo 1990 Chianti Rufina 17 Drink 2009

Unusual to find a 19- year- old wine on a supermarket shelf. Lighter than some Vin Santos, this may provide tangy, fond reminders of Tuscan holidays for some. 17%
£14.99 per 37.5cl major M&S stores

Berrys', Tokaji Aszu, 5 Puttonyos 2005 Tokaji 16.5 Drink 2009-15

From Royal Tokaji Wine Co. Lovely smashed apricots nose with strong pear juice streak. Masses of acidity. Just 5.5% alcohol.
£19.95 per 50cl Berry Bros

Ch Rieussec 2004 Sauternes 17 Drink 2009-16

Proper wine from Ch Lafite's sweet wine farm. Slightly burnt and medicinal. Quite developed enough on the nose to be approachable already. Very rewarding.
£39 Jeroboams

STRONG AND SWEET

Sainsbury's, Ruby NV port 16 Drink 2009-11

Completely ridiculous price for a rich essence of three- year- old Douro wine. Spicy sweet with real interest. Compare and contrast the cost of a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon at almost the same alcohol level. Just throbbing with life. Long and spicy and peppery. 19%

£4.99 per 75cl, £6.89 per litre Sainsbury's 603 stores

Quinta do Noval, 10 Year Old Tawny NV port 16 Drink 2008-10

Rich yet savoury with a hint of coffee grounds. Enjoy very lightly chilled with cheddar. A special, rather silly price. 19.5%
£10.99 Tesco, Booths

Mont Tauch NV Muscat de Rivesaltes 16 Drink 2009

Muscat de Rivesaltes is ten a penny but this co-op seems to have got the balance between orange flower scents and lushness just right. Drink while it's young and fresh.
15.5%
£5.99 per 37.5cl Booths

De Bortoli, Show Reserve Liqueur Muscat NV South Eastern Australia 16.5 Drink now

Walnut brown colour - like very alcoholic liquid Christmas cake. An Australian classic style. Try with ice cream. 18%
£11.99 Majestic (or 2 bottles at £9.99 each)

La Tour Vieille, Reserva NV Banyuls 16.5 Drink 2009-14

Grenache Gris and Grenache Noir. Alcohol-steeped raisins. Rich, sweet, figgy from just north of the Spanish border in Roussillon. Much drier tasting than it smells. 16%
£14.95 Yapp Bros

Delaforce, Quinta da Corte 1991 port 17 Drink 2009-14

Fantastic aroma of spiced fruit cake with a touch of chocolate. Sweet and rounded and lovely balance. Perfect for drinking now. 20.5%
£17.99 Majestic or 2 bottles at £15.99 each

Domecq, Venerable 30 Year Old Pedro Ximénez VORS NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry 17.5 Drink 2008-11

Black with yellow rim. Massive gunsmoke aromas with treacle, smoothness and real energy on the palate. 17%
£25 Wine Society

Barbeito, 10 Years Old Verdelho NV Madeira 18 Drink 2008-18

Wonderful, award-winning Atlantic essence that has great revitalising acidity beautifully balanced with just the right amount of fruitiness from the Verdelho grape that is now very rare on the cruise ship island. Serve with or without food. Sensible pairings suggested on the back label. The **10 Year Old Malvasia** at £24.40 is a bit heavier and also worth a whirl, but not as special as this Verdelho. 19%
£25.95 Berry Bros

Fladgate Partnership - Quinta & Vineyard Bottlers 1994 port 17 Drink 2011-17

An extra seven years' bottle age on the wine below. A bit of subtlety that really does give more than a hint of vintage port's special charms... Still lots of tannin but lovely prunes and violets too. 20%
£26.99 major M&S stores

Taylor's, Quinta da Vargellas 2001 port 17.5+ Drink 2010-25

Still very firm and no hurry to drink but a great value way of experiencing Taylor's class. 20.5%
£27 Majestic buy 2 bottles save £4 £25

Dow's Quinta do Bomfim 1998 port 17.5 Drink 2007-17

Wonderfully warm and comforting with reassuring, velvety maturity. This wine has been covered with glory in various significant wine competitions.
From £28.49 Noel Young, Taurus Wines, Adnams, Tanners

Fladgate Partnership - Quinta & Vineyard Bottlers, 20 Year Old Tawny NV port 17 Drink 2009-12

Long aged in cask rather than bottle. Red and raisiny. Lovely nutty stuff on the end. Great excitement! Real nerve. 20%
£29.99 M&S 200 stores

González Byass, Noe Viejo 30 Year Old Pedro Ximénez NV Jerez - Xérès - Sherry 16.5 Drink 2008-11

Brownish green, very dark, and very sweet but with great refreshing acidity too. Really tangy and treacly. Utterly indulgent on every level and much more refreshing than many a PX. 15.5%
£15.99 per 37.5cl Oddbins, limited availability

Dow 1963 port 19 Drink 1985-2015

Perfection now - a wine that proves it is worth waiting for vintage port. Or, try Graham 1970, another great wine of the vintage (Drink 1995-2025) that may be offered at even less via www.wine-searcher.com
Around £100 Peter Wylie, Underwood Wines

Valdespino, Tonoles Moscatel NV Sherry 18 Drink 2005-15

Ancient relic from the Valdespino bodegas. Brown, lustrous, rich and historic. Thick and syrupy with an exciting kick of acidity. Fresher than most PX-based sweet sherries.
15%
£300 The Sampler