

Greatest buys - fizz

12 Dec 2009 by Jancis Robinson/ FT

Champagne is being used mercilessly by the big UK retailers to fight for your custom. Be circumspect in which 'bargain' you choose see, for example, our updated [Champagne deals – the good and the bad](#).

Not all famous names taste as good as the best growers' champagnes, and most supermarkets' own brands of champagne are decidedly inferior. Very careful winnowing was needed to produce the list of distinctly superior wines buys below.

Head for 2002, a great champagne vintage drinking deliciously now. All wines below are 12 to 12.5% alcohol and all but the first four are champagne. For international stockists, see www.wine-searcher.com. Some of the smaller merchants may impose minimum orders, and delivery may be extra. Check the small print.

For more recent tasting notes, click on the champagne tag at the bottom of this article.

For tasting notes on some of the best English sparkling wines, which are getting better and better, see [here](#). Unfortunately English wine cannot be made inexpensively and, with UK retailers using champagne as a ploy to lure customers via ridiculous special deals, I found it impossible to find one that I felt offered such good value as the rest of the wines mentioned here. Very unfair, I know, but the reality as I see it.

Villiera, Brut Natural Chardonnay 2007 Stellenbosch 16 Drink 2009-10

Not champagne but made the same way. Clean and dry and with a bit of evolution even. Perfectly acceptable South African alternative to champagne. 12%
£9.99 M&S major stores

Jansz, Premium NV Tasmania 16 Drink 2009-10

Some development on the nose. Just off dry. Clean, brisk and very fresh - just very slightly tight at the moment but good value. 12.5%
£11.99 or £9.59 in a mixed case Oddbins

Ch Rives- Blanques 2007 Blanquette de Limoux 16.5 Drink 2009-10

Mainly apple- like Mauzac grapes. Light, fresh nose with real bite and length. Well done - very refreshing. For more detail on this and the wine below, see my [recent articles about Limoux](#). 13%
From £12.40 Tanners, Great Western Wine, The Vintry, James Nicholson

Françoise Antech, Cuvée Émotion Rosé NV Crémant de Limoux 16.5 Drink 2008-09

Smoky and well integrated on the nose with strawberry fruit. Really quite delicate and the bottle looks rather beautiful too. Should be very popular in view of the fashionable status of pink fizz.
£12.50 Hercules Wine Warehouse

Sainsbury's, Blanc de Noirs NV Champagne 15.5 Drink 2009-10

It may be a supermarket label but it's a great buy. Not complex but very well balanced and palatable.
£15 Sainsbury's 650 stores

Waitrose, Blanc de Noirs NV Champagne 16.5 Drink 2009-12

Good value from Alexandre Bonnet's own Pinot Noir vineyards around the village of Les Riceys in the Aube. 12.2%
£18.99 Waitrose Wine Direct and 216 stores

Marc Chauvet, Brut Tradition NV Champagne 16.5 Drink 2008-10

Great value Rilly- la- Montagne grower's champagne that is unusually satisfying for the price. Based on 2005 with 30% reserve wine from older vintages. 12%
£18.99 The Real Wine Co

Waitrose, Brut NV Champagne 17 Drink 2009-10

From the P&C Heidsieck stable and based on 2006. Rich, creamy lemon nose. Intense and fresh and very pure and zesty. Gold medal winner in the International Wine Challenge. 12%
£19.99 Waitrose Wine Direct and all stores

Heidsieck Monopole, Silver Top 2002 Champagne 16 Drink 2009-11

Probably the best Heidsieck Monopole you're likely to see, from an excellent vintage. Pretty sweet at first but with attractive creaminess and a certain zippiness and urgency on the finish.
£20 Tesco Wine By The Case

Charles Heidsieck, Brut Réserve NV Champagne 16.5 Drink 2008-11

Great special offer price for the finest Heidsieck's flagship blend.
£20.79 Waitrose 160 stores

St- Gall, Grand Cru 2002 Champagne 17 Drink 2009-12

An all- Chardonnay Blanc de Blancs from the admirable Union co- op. Some complexity on the nose. Very chewy. But there is a real spine here. Clearly a superior vintage and a great (reduced) price. Not a very exciting label mind... 12%
£21.99 M&S 300 stores

Bérèche & Fils, Réserve Brut NV Champagne 17.5 Drink 2009-12

Very fine bead. Perfumed like Riesling! (No higher praise...) Very nicely balanced. Quite a bit of residual sugar but not sweet at all - just very refreshing. Sleek.
£23.75 Vine Trail

Barnaut, Grande Réserve Brut Grand Cru NV Champagne 17 Drink 2008-11

Great value from the unforgettably named village of Bouzy. Pinot Noir dominates. The **Blanc de Noirs** at £24.95 is even deeper- flavoured.
£23.95 Lea & Sandeman, £22.50 if 6 are bought

Chartogne- Taillet Brut NV Champagne 17 Drink 2009-10

Tiny bead. Full panoply of exotic fruits. Great balance. What the heck is not to like? Sooo easy. There may not be much of a future in this wine, and it's far from the densest, but it is lovely now.
£23.95 Vine Trail

Laurent Perrier, Ultra Brut NV Champagne 17 Drink 2009-11

One of the most successful bone- dry champagnes. The price is much higher elsewhere.
£24.99 Elixir Wines and elsewhere

R & L Legras, Brut NV Champagne 17 Drink 2009-11

Great to see Berry Bros taking the trouble to source a range of growers' champagnes. Lovely development on the nose. Graceful and zesty on the palate. Real filigree texture. Lovely and complete. Quite long. Quite a bargain for Berys.
£25.95 Berry Bros

Geoffroy, Pureté Brut Zero Premier Cru NV Champagne 17 Drink 2008-11

Very delicate nose. Fresh and delicate on the palate too without any aggressive acidity. You'd never guess it was only 2 g/ l dosage from how well balanced and fruity it tastes, so congratulations!
£26.75 Berry Bros

R & L Legras, Brut Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru NV Champagne 17 Drink 2007-09

Very fine with quite a developed nose. Relatively mellow for a Blanc de Blancs, but very easy to drink in quantity. Has a certain nuttiness. Long.
£26.95 Lea & Sandeman or £24.95 if 6 are bought

Larmandier- Bernier, Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Premier Cru NV Champagne 17.5 Drink 2009-13

Lots of lovely development on the nose. Not especially fizzy but a really complete 100% Chardonnay that spreads across the palate. The featherlight **Terre de Vertus Non-Dosé** at about £4 more is an object lesson in terroir.
£27.50 Vine Trail, £31.95 Lea & Sandeman, or £29.75 if 6 bottles are bought

Jacquart, Brut Mosaïque 2002 Champagne 17 Drink 2008-10

Mushroom- shaped cork suggests there was quite a bit of bottle age on the sample I tasted. The class of this vintage shows through this co- operative offering, which is a good

buy at the special offer price. Attractive smokiness and a zesty, dry finish.
£29.99 or 2 bottles at £19.99 each Majestic

Lilbert et Fils, Blanc de Blancs Grand Cru Perlé NV Champagne 17 Drink 2008-11

Old- vine Chardonnay from Cramant and only 4 atmospheres of pressure. Very delicate, like the brush of a feather on a cheek. Light in body but intense, rather mineral flavour. Think Chablis to most champagne's Meursault. Very unusual. Bone dry, a real appetite- whetter.
£31.25 Vine Trail, £37.99 The Sampler

Vilmart, Grand Cellier NV Champagne 17 Drink 2009-12

Captivatingly complex on the nose. A little bit sweet on the front palate. Very flattering but not the most refreshing or revitalising. For late- night drinking?
£31.95 Berry Bros, £37.95 Gauntleys of Nottingham

Clos de La Chapelle, Exquis Premier Cru NV Champagne 17 Drink 2008-11

From Villedommange; more information at www.Cdelachapelle.com. Complex nose with real zest and depth and particularly fine, tiny bubbles. Not aggressive at all. Featherlight.
£34.99 The Sampler

Georges Laval, Brut Premier Cru NV Champagne 17.5 Drink 2008-12

From Cumières. Biodynamic with low dosage, and all three grape varieties vinified in oak. Pretty wild nose, which at first I took for autolysis but I think it's that old biodynamic wild- flower thing. Great balance and complexity. Not very aggressively fizzy. Really complete and intellectual
£37.50 Vine Trail, £48.99 The Sampler

Paul Bara, Brut Millésime Grand Cru 2000 Champagne 17 Drink 2007-10

90% Pinot Noir with 10% Chardonnay from Bouzy. Very firm and with lots of yeast autolysis and sturdy aged character on the nose (I tasted it from a half bottle but the drinking dates are what I imagine for a regular 75cl bottle). Serious stuff. For drinking with food: creamy chicken?
£37.99 bottle, £19.99 half The Sampler

Pol Roger 1999 Champagne 18 Drink 2007-11

Very opulent and glorious and exotic. Very hedonistic - a real crowd pleaser. Special offer price.
£39.99 Oddbins, £360 per dozen in bond Farr Vintners and Bordeaux Index

Mumm de Cramant, Grand Cru Chardonnay NV Champagne 16.5 Drink 2008-10

Very delicate and carefully judged.
£44.95 Harrods

Larmandier- Bernier, Vieilles Vignes de Cramant Extra Brut 2004 Champagne 17 Drink 2009-13

Rather oaky and serious on the nose. Very serious and complex. Not heavyweight though. Unusual structure.
£55 Berry Bros

Cédric Bouchard, Blanc de Noirs Inflorescence La Parcelle 2002 Champagne 17 Drink 2010-15

From the southern Aube department. Light nose. Very pretty Pinot Noir flavours are coaxed out of it on the palate. Biodynamic and zero dosage but you would never guess. This actually tastes quite sweet to me, perhaps the friendliness of ripe Pinot? Only gentle fizz. Very tightly wound and satisfying on the palate. Serious stuff. Quite long. Still a little astringent on the finish.
£59.99 The Sampler

Dom Ruinart 1990 Champagne 18 Drink 2010-22

Great vintage of this de luxe Blanc de Blancs. Still very tense and a great aperitif. Very good price for a wine of this quality and maturity.
£94.25 Rodney Densem Wines

Philipponnat, Clos des Goisses 1990 Champagne 19 Drink 2000-16

Stunning, single- vineyard champagne from a great vintage. Very rich and powerful. The **1995** is glorious too.
£350 a bottle Nickolls & Perks

Next week - strong and sweet wines