

30 Sep 2001 by JR

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| <p>Petit Bourgeois Blanc 2000 Henri Bourgeois</p> <p>If a global recession is looming, we should presumably tighten our belts. And what better way than to adopt the frugal habits of the petit bourgeois and treat ourselves to this stunning bargain labelled Petit Bourgeois? Henri Bourgeois is the most consistently exciting producer in Sancerre, an often disappointing appellation. The Bourgeois family keep pushing forward the frontiers for what you might think would be a limited repertoire of flavours and styles, with late harvest wines, micro-oxygenated wines, oaked wines (hmmm), single vineyard bottlings and even direct investment in Sancerre's New World usurper Marlborough, New Zealand.</p> <p>Petit Bourgeois is a simple Vin de Pays made from Sauvignon Blanc grown on parcels of land just outside the Sancerre appellation, mainly calcareous but with a bit of silex. I tell you, one sniff of the 2000 vintage at this stage and you're in a Paris wine bar. Not one of the newfangled sort run by a Meilleur Sommelier du Monde, but one of those lovely, very simple, rather down-at-heel old-fashioned ones in a back street offering hunks of <i>Poillâne</i> bread, fresh <i>croissants</i> and slivers of glistening <i>jambon du pays</i>. All that atmosphere and you don't even have to wait in line for a plane. Just seek out a bottle from the attached <a href="#">list of suppliers</a> to whom Henri Bourgeois claim to ship the wine. I can hardly believe it. But if one of these addresses fails, there is certainly no shortage of alternatives...</p> <p>Bourgeois' UK importer Caves de Pyrène of Guildford on 01483 538820 (who won't have stock until the end of October) will charge £4.95 for this wine before VAT (£5.82 inc VAT), which makes it infinitely better value than most Sancerres. There is real purity about this wine, not least because the 2000s are so much more typical of the region than the much softer 1999s. Don't cellar it though. Buy their ultra-tense, greengage-scented Sancerre MD 2000 from the Monts Damnés for drinking next summer.</p> <p><b>Jan 2002:</b> Just found this wine reposing on the list of Queen's wine merchant Corney &amp; Barrow of London EC1 (tel 020 7539 3200) at £.64 a bottle. It's still tasting good.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">02/10/01 - updated 16/1/02</p> | <a href="#">Back to top</a> |
| <p>Promessa Rosso Salento 2000 Puglia</p> <p>American Mark Shannon and Elvezia Sbalchiero have been crazy about their adopted home on the heel of the boot of Italy for years, but they must feel particularly good about this out-of-the-way, quintessentially Mediterranean location at the moment. Not too much risk of Taleban retaliation here, I would have thought - even taking Berlusconi's rantings into account.</p> <p>The couple specialise in transforming the dark fruit of old Puglian vines into thoroughly modern, velvety wines. Their most famous and successful wine to date has been A Mano Primitivo which has won many a friend but just hasn't done it for me. Just a little too sweet and polished perhaps. Virtually all their other wines have emerged under the (visually very similar) Promessa range and I really like this new addition, their first deliberately blended as opposed to varietal wine. To me it has a more subtle spread of flavours - not just out-and-out ripeness but a good backbone and an appetisingly dry finish which suggests there is no desperate hurry to drink it.</p> <p>The blend is based on Negroamaro, the most common Puglian grape, some of the vines more than 70 years old and all growing as spreading bushes in the dry earth just south of Brindisi on the Salento peninsula. But about 15 per cent of the wine is Primitivo, Zinfandel's Italian ancestor, the grape that Mark and Elvezia believe to be Puglia's finest, grown even further south.</p> <p>This is one of those wines designed to sell at a specific price which retailers love, in this case £4.99, at Sainsburys, Villeneuve Wines of Peebles in Scotland, Valvona &amp; Crolla in Edinburgh (Britain's best Italian wine retailer) and Fintry Wines of West Mersea in Essex.</p> <p><a href="#">Neil Empson</a>, who has excellent links with America's Italian wine specialists, imports it into the US.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">09/10/01</p>   | <a href="#">Back to top</a> |

#### Andrew's Hope Sauvignon Blanc 2001 Swartland, South Africa

I have long been a fan of South Africa's better Sauvignons. They have the race of the Loire with the immediate appeal of New World winemaking. They may not be quite as dramatically pungent as New Zealand's, but that can make them better partners for food. They're milder, better-mannered.

This one from the Spice Route Wine Company, 'in South Africa's viticultural frontier, the wild west of Swartland' as they see it, is seriously fine for the money. Swartland is north-west of Cape Town, its unirrigated vineyards cooled by breezes off the Atlantic - quite different terrain from the manicured lawns of Stellenbosch.

The fruit for this wine is grown on a farm that is being converted to organic production and the wine certainly has very obvious extract and concentration. This is no fly-by-night, sweetened-up Sauvignon. Like all the Spice Route wines it was made by the talented and increasingly garlanded Eben Sadie who has worked in Burgundy, California, Oregon and - here's exotic - Württemberg. According to the indispensable *John Platter South African Wines* annual pocket book (the 2002 edition is out in early November, for information contact [winebook@mweb.co.za](mailto:winebook@mweb.co.za)), he is equally crazy about surfing and organised the first Vintners Surf Classic on the high rollers of South Africa's West Coast in June last year.

It is fairly inevitable then that I will tell you this is a wine that surfs across the palate but only after washing a brisk breeze of appetisingly lean, green fruits up your nose, the result apparently of night-harvesting and careful canopy management.

Brits can find this wine under the name Amos Kuil Sauvignon Blanc 2001 for £5.99 at major Marks & Spencer stores. Americans should contact Vineyard Brands who import Spice Route's many increasingly interesting wines into the US.

P.S. Don't worry, you sybarites out there. I will not linger at the bottom of the wine price ladder for ever!

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#### Kistler Pinot Noir, Sonoma

In New York last week I was treated to a fascinating comparison of Kistler and Marcassin Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. I have long been a fan of Kistler's intense, finely wrought Chardonnays with more than a hint of Coche-Dury-like sulphides about them (this sounds horrid but isn't when present in only trace-like quantities). These Sonoma Chardonnays generally age superbly - at least as well as most *premier cru* Burgundy - as well as being more open and approachable in youth than white Burgundy generally is. Marcassin Chardonnays have in my experience been more variable - sometimes stunning but often just too thick or sweet. Perhaps the problem with the distinctly sweet, heavy Marcassin 1993 Gauer Ranch Chardonnay was that we were drinking it simply too old; I believe Helen Turley the winemaker advocates pretty immediate uncorking. But the Kistler 1992 Kistler Vineyard Chardonnay tasted far, far younger and subtler with notes of lively green fruit, a certain deep nuttiness and a touch of caramel.

The comparison between the two Pinots was more precise as both were 1996 Sonoma Coast, but the same general picture emerged. While the Marcassin was too sweet and alcoholic to be refreshing, the Kistler Cuvée Catherine had that jewel-like, multi-faceted precision that characterises fine Côte de Beaune reds. It was lively, still chewy but had great acidity and depth (while a Martinelli 1997 Pinot Noir split the difference between the two wines). If I owned the Kistler 1996 I would wait a year or two before opening a bottle.

All of which made me remember just how impressive the Pinot Noirs were when I visited the Kistler winery a couple of years ago. I know they are not easy to find (especially outside the US), and tend to cost a fortune, but I do think Steve Kistler is on a roll with Pinots as well as the team's much better-distributed Chardonnays.

Seek ([WineSearcher](#) for a start) and ye shall find. Although only at the most ridiculous prices (\$US 250 a bottle for that '96 Catherine, far more for any Marcassin Pinot, and generally more than \$US 100 a bottle for any Kistler Pinot, as opposed to around \$US 70 for any Kistler Chardonnay). Surely the current economic situation will soften demand and therefore prices for California wine. Surely?

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I have been rather mean about Australia recently (see my [recent piece](#) in the *Financial Times*) but I mean it when I say that Australia produces some very fine wines, and this one strikes me as typical of a uniquely Australian style of sophisticated white wine. The Verdelho grape is one of the country's attributes, doubtless shipped there centuries ago by settlers who dropped anchor in Portugal or the Portuguese island of Madeira en route. Verdelho is one of the great classic vinifera varieties of Madeira (the headache-free fortified wine) but in Australia produces wonderfully characterful full-bodied dry whites with a refreshingly lemony streak of acidity. (The Portuguese government has just been coerced into deciding on one and only one name for each of its native grape varieties and has for some reason decided to abandon the name Verdelho de Douro in favour of the synonym Gouveia, for example. Periquita, once virtually a brand name, is no longer allowed as a principal grape name.)

This Verdelho is made by the Margan family, a conscientious outfit relatively new to winemaking (as opposed to grape growing) in Sydney's vinous backyard, the Hunter Valley, which has been sprouting new wineries at an almost unbelievable rate in the last few years. According to the Australian wine bible, James Halliday's *Wine Companion 2002* (HarperCollins in Australia, Grub Street in the UK), Andrew Margan followed in his father's winery footsteps 20 years ago (the company boasts of 30 years' history on the label) and worked both as a flying winemaker in Europe and at selling the stuff for Tyrrell's.

To me it is a lovely wine to drink as an aperitif, being beautifully satin-textured but with this really zesty, citrus tang. However, it has quite enough body to stand up to all sorts of chicken dishes when you're in a white wine mood. Drink this any time over the next year or two.

Tanners of Shrewsbury list it at £8.95 a bottle, more or less the same price as [www.virginwines.co.uk](http://www.virginwines.co.uk) who are now in cahoots with Amazon UK. Australians can find it for much less at Top Wine in Australia while the Southern Hemisphere Wine Center of California is offering it for about US \$13 a bottle.

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Nuits-St-Georges, Clos des Argillières 1999 Bouchard Père et Fils

The transformation of Bouchard Père et Fils from powerful but moribund Beaune *négociant* to reliable source of exciting, relatively-early-maturing wines has been one of the most dramatic stories in contemporary Burgundy. Some of the lesser red wines in the mid 1990s verged on pastiches of modern Burgundy but the whites have long been first class and most reds are extremely reliable. They may not be the most subtle, earthy wines, but they do the business. (See [my story on the top five Burgundy négociants](#) for more background.)

This particular wine is a particularly deep and lustrous crimson and positively explodes with come-hither appeal, with notes of rich licorice on a base of autumn leaves (very topical for those of us in the northern hemisphere - though fortunately they're taking their time to fall this year, aren't they?). The flavour reverberates on the palate for more than a minute after swallowing or spitting (not that I recommend the latter). All in all, a lovely bottle to drink over the holidays this year - a potentially please-all-accompaniment to turkey and its sweet bits.

The superior British supermarket Waitrose still has a week or two's stock left in its top 45 wine stores at £26.95 a bottle. This Premier Cru Clos is only four hectares in area and Bouchard have access to just a quarter, or about about 400 cases, of the average annual production so there is not much to go round, I'm afraid. If you can't find this particular wine, ask your favourite retailer to recommend a 1999 red Burgundy that is already good to drink now, or see [my specific recommendations](#) earlier this year.

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Col Solare 1997 Washington State

This, the third release from a joint venture between Piero Antinori of Tuscany and Château Ste Michelle, the dominant wine producer of America's second most important wine state, was looking superb at a [recent blind tasting](#). So superb in fact that Marchese Piero himself voted for it above the famous Solaia 1990 which sells for three to four times the price.

I'm usually a bit dubious about these joint ventures, especially when early vintages carry disproportionately high price tags, but this wine is exciting not just for its inherent quality but for what it shows is possible in Washington state.

It's made mainly from Cabernet Sauvignon with some Merlot and a little bit of Syrah. Still a deep purple, this youthful wine exudes a deliciously warm but neat scent, suggesting the comfort of digestive biscuits dunked in tea with the nobility of super-pure, perfectly ripe, healthy grapes. The wine attacks the palate with real grace and vigour and follows through with a flatteringly silky texture and great elegance despite the lovely sweetness of the fruit. A long finish completes what is already a delicious wine but one that will be even better, I'm afraid, in five years and should last another 10 - an unusually long time for a Washington wine.

Most of the grapes to date have come from Château Ste Michelle's Horse Heaven vineyard where Antinori have given viticultural advice, according to a useful new book, *Wines of the Pacific Northwest* by Lisa Shara Hall (Mitchell Beazley £25, \$40 US, \$50 Canadian). During the German wine weekend at which this tasting took place, however, Piero Antinori told me he had his eye on Red Mountain as a future source of even better grapes.

He also told me, incidentally, that his 600-year-old Florentine family company had planted vines on high ground in Krygyzstan, the central Asian republic between Kazakhstan and China. This is less because Antinori have identified this mountainous terrain as a potential source of great wine, and more to help out a desperately poor country under the auspices of a German government humanitarian scheme with which an old friend is involved. Nevertheless, Krygyzstan Riesling, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay planted at 1600 m are already showing some promise. Watch out for the ultimate bamboozling bottle for blind tasting.

See [WineSearcher](#) for stockists and the varied prices of Col Solare 1997 in both the US and Italy. Peake Wines of Fareham in Hampshire (tel 01329 822 733) and Lanchester Fine Wine of Stanley in Tyne & Wear (tel 01207 521234) are the only UK stockists that Château Ste Michelle's importers (who are also responsible for the wildly different Jacob's Creek brand) could suggest. They suggest to them that they charge £45 for it.

Next week - something a bit cheaper, you may be glad to know.

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Weissenkirchner Achleiten Grüner Veltliner Smaragd 1999 Freie Weingärtner Wachau

Are you searching for a really stunning dry white wine to titillate your palate and those of your friends? Look no further.

Austria is making such fantastic, food-friendly, whistle-clean white wines now, and this is a great example from a classic vintage (unlike the much more obvious, riper, earlier maturing 1998 and 2000). Apart from some great sweet whites and reds being made around the shallow lake Neusiedlersee in Burgenland and some crisp Sauvignons from Styria, Austria's great dry white wines are made in the Wachau/ Kamptal/ Kremstal nucleus of contiguous wine regions. Wachau has the oldest reputation and the greatest scenery, being on the rocky, steep sides of the Danube river about an hour's drive upstream of Vienna. Richard the Lionheart imprisoned in Dürnstein castle, Blondel and all that.

The long-winded producer name is that of the Wachau's extremely respectable co-op which 'one is tempted to call the world's best wine co-operative', writes David Schildknecht in the current issue of Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar* (a very useful New York-based newsletter on 1-800-WINE-505). Controlling about 40 per cent of all Wachau vineyards, it is on a roll. Its staff look extremely youthful but are certainly doing the business.

Grüner Veltliner is of course Austria's own white grape and can produce full-bodied wines with real character - a character strangely but not unpleasantly reminiscent of dill or even gherkins. Very lively! And the wines can age beautifully. No hurry to drink this one.

The Achleiten vineyard is proof-positive of the *terroir* effect. It always manages to stamp its heavy mineral personality on to any wine grown in it and this pungent Grüner Veltliner is no exception - in fact it is one of FWW's most successful wines. It is bone-dry, has lovely pure acidity and a lean seam of smoke through the middle. This full-bodied wine would be just the thing for the chilli-sauced scallops you planned for a first course. Could survive smoked salmon too. The 2000 vintage of this wine may get there but is much less defined and pungent at the moment.

The US importer is Vin Divino of Chicago, and the following UK merchants can also supply it:

FWW (UK) Ltd, Surrey (tel 020 8786 8161) £11.50  
Ben Ellis Wines, Brockham, Surrey (tel 01737 842160) £11.50  
Bouquet Wines, London SW3 (tel 020 7351 9623) £117.90 per dozen  
Fortnum & Mason, London SW1 (tel 020 7734 8040) £11.50  
Mayfair Cellars, London SW6 (tel 020 7386 7999, web [www.mayfaircellars.co.uk](http://www.mayfaircellars.co.uk)) £14.25  
Weavers Way Wine Cellars, Norfolk (tel 01263 731272) £9.72.

Isabel Estate Pinot Noir 2000 Marlborough, New Zealand

I was at New Zealand's first major international Pinot Noir festival last January (see [New Zealand - a great Pinot Noir resource?](#)) and tasted some pretty good stuff. Unfortunately, few of the 24 2000 Pinots shown at the official new release tasting in London a month ago did much to wow the troops about the country's undoubted Pinot potential. To show your wine on the gloriously panoramic 17th floor of New Zealand House you have to be a member of the trade association, and as we all know, it is not in the nature of many a fine winemaker to join such organisations. So there was no Dry River, no Fromm, no Gibbston Valley, no Greenhough, no Valli, etc, etc.

Instead there were two too many hot Pinots from Hawkes Bay and too few from the more metaphorically hot Central Otago region - although it was good of Felton Road to show its keenly sought Block 3 (£21.49 from [smallbrook@dia1.pipex.com](mailto:smallbrook@dia1.pipex.com)). Peregrine (£12.95 from [Berry Bros & Rudd](#)) looked pretty good and serious - neither sweet nor vapid - for the money.

The wine that stood out for me - okay, I have to admit it was because it was the one that tasted most savoury, structured and burgundian - was the Isabel Estate ([www.isabelestate.com](http://www.isabelestate.com)), from a family of great grape growers. This wine has serious undertow and real fruit in the middle as well as tannin (something singularly lacking in many of these pale examples), suggesting that it will be far from a one-season wonder.

UK importers Morris & Verdin of London SE1 (020 7921 5300) have just received their allocation but will be spreading it thinly around their restaurant customers so act fast if you're interested. Their price of £14.50 a bottle looks remarkably fair to me. And Isabel's has long been one of the driest, most mineral - all right, most Loire-like - of the hundreds of Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs that are now bottled. M & V's price for the 2001, £9.90, is again perfectly fair.

To track down this wine outside the UK you could contact Isabel's various distributors:

| In Europe:   | In Australia:  | In the US:   |
|--|--|--|
| <a href="#">Residence Wijnen</a><br>Dorpskade 33<br>2291 HN Wateringen (NL)<br>BTW NL007391602B01<br>Tel: (+31) 0 174 270500<br>Fax: (+31) 0 174 270405<br>Email: <a href="mailto:info@residence-wijnen.nl">info@residence-wijnen.nl</a> | <a href="#">Mezzanine</a><br><a href="#">Red + White</a> | <a href="#">Adventures in Wine</a><br>440 Talbert Street<br>Daly City, CA 94014<br>Tel: (+1) 415-467-0130<br>Fax: (+1) 415-467-0133<br>Email: <a href="mailto:merrick@adventuresinwine.com">merrick@adventuresinwine.com</a> |

Quinta do Noval 10- year- old tawny port

Now is the season for port drinking where I live (London) and here is a style of port you can enjoy whatever the temperature for it can be awfully satisfying when drunk chilled.

I have to say that I find (true) tawny port matured in wood easier on the cranium than deep ruby ports that are bottled much earlier in their lives. I've been tasting a lot of port recently and on several occasions this particular wine has really stood out as being much more vigorous and satisfying than its peers - including the new, ultra-trendy Warre's Otima 10- year- old tawny in its clear glass half- litre for almost as much money. It has that slight touch of *rancio* that comes from many years in wood but mainly it is a thoroughly delicious blend of fruit and nuts (no chocolate).

In fact, Noval ports in general have stood out in comparisons of ports below vintage port level and seem much improved. This may well be at least partly thanks to Christian Seely, the (relatively) young man whom owners AXA Millésimes (the wine arm of the insurance giant which encompasses Chx Pichon Longueville, Cantenac Brown, etc) put in charge of Noval some years ago. AXA are clearly pleased with him because they have transferred him from Portugal to Bordeaux and promoted him to take over responsibility for all of AXA Millésimes. He has taken over from the Médoc's most cosmopolitan wine man, Jean- Michel Cazes, who has now retired to his own property Ch Lynch Bages.

All of this may seem irrelevant, but oddly enough, **Quinta do Noval Traditional Late Bottled Vintage 1996 Port** (which is unfiltered and needs decanting) tastes strangely claret- like. It is full, sweet and youthful with many a subtle layer and compares favourably with many other 1996 LBVs on the market at the moment. It retails in Britain at merchants such as Eton Vintners and [Averys of Bristol](#) at about £11 and there is no hurry to drink it.

The 10- year- old tawny is about £15 in Britain (not bad for a wine that is at least 10 years old) from the following retailers:

Waitrose  
Eton Vintners of Eton, Berkshire  
Wimbledon Wines of London SW19  
Fenwick of Newcastle  
Holland Park Wine Company of London W11  
Quellyn Roberts of Chester  
Weavers of Nottingham  
Dartmouth Vintners of Dartmouth, Devon  
Uncorked of London EC2  
Noel Young Wines of Trumpington, Cambridge  
Harrods of London SW3  
Fortnum and Mason of London SW1  
The Bristol Wine Company, Bristol

In the US, Noval ports are quite widely available. These are some specific New York retailers suggested by Noval itself but see [WineSearcher](#) for many more. Expect to pay about \$20 a bottle for this delicious 10- year- old tawny.

Astor Wines and Spirits, 12 Astor Place, NYC 10003 (tel 212 674 7500)  
Garnet Wines and Liquors, 929 Lexington Ave, NYC 10021 (tel 212 772 3211 )  
Windsor Wine Shop, 474 Lexington Ave, NYC 10016 (tel 212 779 4422)

Doix 1999 Priorat

Here's an interesting newcomer to an interesting region in the wild hills above Tarragona in Catalonia, north- east Spain. (New wines and producers are sprouting on these slopes all the time; not all of them worthy successors to the likes of Alvaro Palacios who has made the region famous.) Like all good wines grown on the region's famous licorella brown slate, Doix has tastable minerality about it, but this one also has some pretty suave fruit to fill in the mid- palate too. It's a full- bodied, grown- up red that makes great cold- weather drinking and needs some pretty chewy food with it, but has been made with enough sophistication to make it drinkable already even though it is clearly intended for the long term.

The 1999 is the debut vintage from the Doix family's property Mas Doix whose produce went straight to the Poboleda cooperative until then (a familiar story). The vines are old Carifena and Garnacha - again the standard Priorat recipe - plus some younger Syrah plantings. It is a compliment that in the US Eric Solomon, married to Daphne Glorian, the woman behind Clos Erasmus, is just beginning to import the wine.

The very wine- minded Spanish newspaper *El Mundo*, which has its own wine website ([www.elmundovino.com](http://www.elmundovino.com)), tasted 36 1999 Priorats blind recently with the following wines coming out top. In the list below their names are followed by the names of their producers, and average points out of 20:

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 1.  | VALL- LLACH 1999 CELLER VALL- LLACH 18.5          |
| 2.  | CLOS MOGADOR 1999 CLOS MOGADOR 18.0               |
| 3.  | L'ERMITA 1999 ALVARO PALACIOS 17.5                |
| 4.  | CLOS ERASMUS 1999 DAPHNE GLORIAN 17.0             |
| 5.  | FINCA DOFI 1999 ALVARO PALACIOS 16.5              |
| 5.  | MAS DE MASOS 1999 CAPAFONS- OSSÓ 16.5             |
| 7.  | CLOS FONT 1999 VITICULTORS MAS D'EN GIL 16.0      |
| 7.  | DOIX 1999 CELLER MAS DOIX 16.0                    |
| 9.  | CIMS DE PORRERA CLASSIC 1999 CIMS DE PORRERA 15.5 |
| 9.  | LAUDES 1999 LA CONRERIA DE SCALA DEI 15.5         |
| 11. | IUGITER 1999 LA CONRERIA DE SCALA DEI 14.5        |
| 11. | PASANAU FINCA LA MORERA 1999 PASANAU GERMANS 14.5 |

Certainly Doix is a name to watch from Priorat. For the moment there is no UK importer (but surely not for long) but Celler Mas Doix is selling to the following countries/ distributors:

Spain / [Vila Viniteca](#) and [Selfoods](#)  
Germany / Ardau  
Switzerland / Ebinger SA and La Casa del Vino  
US / Eric Solomon of European Cellars  
Belgium / [La Buena Vida](#)  
Japan / [Shosan Shoji Co](#)

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#### Côtes du Rhône 2000 Domaine des Espiers

Last week's wine was relatively expensive and not of much use to British visitors so this week's is a complete contrast - an inexpensive bargain available only in the UK and, according to [WineSearcher](#), Lausanne in Switzerland. Mind you, if you were in Vacqueyras and saw a sign for the Domaine de Montvac, you could buy it at the cellar door, probably for about 30 francs (we Brits pay dear for our alcoholic imports).

Philippe Cartoux runs the Gigondas Domaine des Espiers which does not have its own cave. This Côtes du Rhône was made from Grenache and some Syrah vines about 15 years old, mainly round the village of Violès just north of the Vacqueyras boundary (*World Atlas of Wine*, 5th edn, p 137). These lovely ripe grapes were vinified at his wife's cellar, the Domaine de Montvac in Vacqueyras to produce a thoroughly exciting, definitively traditional and serious southern Rhône red with lots of guts, herbs and, at the moment, tannin. You could drink it now with roast meats but it will probably be its mellow best in a couple of years. It's not often you can lay your hands on a wine worth keeping for less than a fiver but La Vigneronne of 105 Old Brompton Road, London SW7 (tel 020 7589 6113, email [sales@lavigneronne.co.uk](mailto:sales@lavigneronne.co.uk)) have a special offer till the end of January of this wine at £55 a dozen (the equivalent of £4.58 a bottle) or £4.95 per single bottle. The usual price is £6.50 but La Vigneronne has to buy lots of it to qualify for Domaine des Espiers Gigondas. This wine is the antithesis of modernity, the sort of wine it is increasingly difficult to find outside small French domaines who have never even heard of flavour- enhancing enzymes.

La Vigneronne is run by Liz and Mike Berry, the former a Master of Wine and both of them vine- growers and residents of southern France not far from Vacqueyras. It was they who were responsible for importing another bargain of this sort, Grande Cassagne from the Costières de Nîmes, a few years back. You can't beat buying straight from the domaine - whether it's you or them.

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#### Wickedly raisiny Pedro Ximénez

Streaming with the commonest of colds and racked by a hacking cough, I'm tempted to suggest cough medicine as wine of this week. Instead, here is the world of wine's very own cough medicine: a wine so dark it's almost black (even though the grapes that make it are pale- skinned); so unctuous it's more of a linctus than a liquid; so sweet it's wicked.

Palomino Fino is the grape responsible for most sherry but dried Pedro Ximénez grapes have always provided the best quality sweetening material for sherries with any sweetness to them. More and more producers in sherry country around Jerez, and in Montilla which makes similar wines to the east, have been bottling super- stickies made exclusively from PX, to rapturous reviews in Spain.

These are wines that are perfect for the depths of winter. Indeed they taste rather like molten Christmas pudding. Sip them cautiously with rich desserts (there is little danger of any food being sweeter than they are), with tangy firm cheeses such as a farmhouse cheddar or Cantal, with new season's walnuts, or just by themselves at the end of a meal. PX can also transform a scoop of ice cream into an adult dessert. A good example has a finish refreshingly reminiscent of what is known in Britain as treacle, and in the US as molasses, which stops it being completely sickly.

Some of the most successful PXs made in sherry country, usually carrying the word Dulce, or sweet, on the label, are Osborne Rare, Pedro Domecq's Venerable, Pilar Aranda's 1730, Sanchez Romate's La Sacristia and, slightly lighter than most, Sandeman's Ambrosante.

PX is the dominant grape in the Montilla region, even for its drier wines, and some of the richest sweet PX wines come from here. Gran Barquero and Alvear's 1830 are names to look out for and in Britain. The Wine Society of Stevenage (tel 01438 741177) sells the unbelievably rich Don PX Gran Reserva 1972 for just £9.95 a half bottle.

For stockists elsewhere, try [WineSearcher](#) or your local Spanish wine specialist. Good health!