

## Belt-tightening wines

25 Oct 2001 by JR

This is the first time since I started writing about wine in 1975 that wine has seemed so frivolous. But then it is also capable of giving succour and cheer.

Wines for an era of austerity need not be austere themselves however. Here are a few standouts from recent tastings in Britain, listed in ascending price order within styles - although note that there is considerable overlap between whites that could be described as Dry and Aromatic. Many Sauvignon Blancs, for instance, are both.

Note that underprivileged places such as eastern Europe, South Africa and bog standard [or 'standard issue' if you absolutely must] Bordeaux are particularly good at supplying bargains.

Apologies to non-Brits for a high proportion of wines available only in Britain. I have marked  those worth seeking outside Britain.

### SPARKLING

**Vouvray Non Vintage Brut, Champalou** £8.17 Les Caves de Pyrène of Guildford (tel 01483 538820)

This is far more fun to drink than any budget champagne - an irreproachably made traditional method Chenin Blanc from the Loire with a lovely open, friendly perfume of apples and honey, flirtatious fizz and an appetisingly dry finish. Great aperitif.

### DRY WHITES

**Bordeaux Semillon 2000 Ginestet** £3.99 Waitrose

This bottle looks worth well over a fiver. What is in it tastes much better than the Calvet Sauvignon Blanc sold alongside it. Be careful not to serve this too cold or you will not taste a thing nor, more importantly, smell anything. A bone-dry, full-bodied wine with real character and no rough edges is quite rare at this price. Much better value than most Chilean Sauvignons under a fiver.

**Rylands Grove Barrel Fermented Chenin 2000 South Africa** £3.99 Tesco

This is stunning value, made by the ubiquitous Kym Milne MW and his colleagues whose work in Sicily and South Africa is particularly outstanding. Difficult to see how the barrel fermentation squares with the price but my advice is to simply go ahead and enjoy a lemon-scented, slightly oaky, long-flavoured wine that is not Chardonnay but made from South Africa's most widely planted grape. Very versatile.

**Hilltop Riverview Chardonnay Pinot Grigio 2000 Hungary** £3.99 Waitrose

Seventy per cent Chardonnay and a borrowed Italian grape name would appear to justify an extra £1.20 a bottle (cf Reka Valley below which was also made by award-winning Amos Kamocsay at Hilltop Neszmezy). The Pinot Gris adds weight to what is otherwise a relatively neutral wine but it is well balanced and good value. It would go with parma ham and melon rather well.

### AROMATIC WHITES

**Reka Valley Hungarian Pinot Gris 2000** £2.79 330 Tesco stores from 8 Oct

You will need a blindfold for this one. Did they really get the price down by skimping on the label design? Surely not. It is just the struggle for central European wine producers to lift themselves off the pricing floor. And their need for western currency, presumably. This is by no means fine wine but it is well made (at the Hilltop Neszmezy winery) and expressive of typical Magyar fire and spice.

**Scholtzenhof Petit Chenin 2000 South Africa** £3.99 Oddbins

Slightly sweet but well packaged (if you like lime green) and well made by Ken Forrester.

**Goats Do Roam White 2001 Paarl, South Africa** £4.99 Sainsburys

Charles Back's red Rhônish blend was a huge success when it was launched two or three years ago and this new white counterpart looks set to win as many friends, even if for the moment it is available at only one retailer. Based on full-bodied Grenache Blanc (the wine is 14 per cent alcohol) and neutral Clairette, it is scented by almost 20 per cent of the aromatic varieties Muscat Blanc and Viognier. This would go well with vibrant flavoured pasta and vegetable dishes.

### REDS

**Venturoso Tempranillo/ Garnacha 2000 CarinTena, Spain** £3.99 Sainsburys

A surprising amount of guts, vigour and personality for the money from one of Spain's many up-and-coming regions. Same grape mix as Rioja but much, much more concentrated and almost tough at the end. No hurry to drink this 14 per cent-er.

**Terra de Lobos 2000 Ribatejo, Portugal** £3.99 Waitrose

Imagine Beaujolais without chaptalisation and with Portuguese density and character. This lively, alcoholic damson juice could easily be served chilled and/ or without food. It is fairly crisp and its importer claims it is the archetypal TV wine (though possibly not quite concentrated enough for some of the stuff we see on our screens at the moment). Uncomplicated wine from the fertile banks of the Tejo made entirely from the grape we used to call Perequita (parrot) but which the Portuguese authorities, in their craven haste to satisfy EU demands that all grapes have only one name, have decreed is now called Castelão.

**Vin de Pays des Portes de la Méditerranée 2000 Chaume Arnaud** £3.99 Great Grog of Edinburgh (tel 0131 444 2332) and Glasgow

This husband- and- wife team keep getting better and better. Even their basic Vin de Pays is sweet, rich and charming, almost chocolaty, without losing any French earthiness. Even better is the Côtes de Rhône 2000 which manages to express *terroir* while being smooth and not too alcoholic and Vinsobres 1999 which is denser and worth cellaring. These two cost £4.99 and £6.99 respectively from Great Grog, a little bit more at [Booths](#) supermarkets, even more from London importer Morris & Verdin of London SE1 and far more in the US.