

wines of the week archive index | jan - mar 2001

25 Nov 2004 by JR

Mud House Sauvignon Blanc 2000 Marlborough

What we all need now after a season of over-indulgence is something that gives the illusion of virtue - a wine with lots of acidity and crisply defined fruit segments that suggests it is the vinous equivalent of the grapefruit diet. New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is the obvious candidate which, furthermore, reminds us there is a part of the world currently enjoying high summer. (Which reminds me that by a curious coincidence, I'll be there at the end of the month.) I tasted a wide range of such wines from the 2000 vintage recently and the wine which elicited the tasting note 'at last!' was Villa Maria's Reserve Wairau Valley which will retail at £9.99 at the most wine-minded branches of Thresher, Wine Rack, [Bottoms Up](#), Victoria Wine, Unwins, Safeway and Tesco when it arrives in the UK at the end of March. (The wines were tasted alphabetically, by the way.) This example of the world's favourite Sauvignon is deliciously mineral in flavour yet creamy in texture with real depth and interest. Too many are just a rasping blend of acid and sweet fruit.

The Mud House wine is a good value runner-up, however. More green fruit than mineral, it should probably be drunk sooner too. This is one wine style that is probably best without food rather than with. Mud House's own website is www.mudhouse.co.nz and the UK importer of their wines is H & H Bancroft on 020 7627 8700 who will sell it as part of a mixed case at £7.50. This is a useful specialist supplier to restaurants and independent retailers such as Philglas & Swiggott (geddit?) of 21 Northcote Road, London SW11 (020 7924 4494) who have been selling single bottles of the 1999 for £9.75.

06/01/01

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Bourgogne Rouge 1999 Domaine Didier Fornerol

The 1999 burgundies, especially the reds, are a joy to taste (most unusual at this stage) and prices are looking pretty good in relation to those of previous vintages and bordeaux. Some of the best buys are at the bottom end - wines that can be enjoyed straight away. This is an outstanding example, which works out at only £6.75 a bottle. There is no shortage of straightforward, ripe, very correct Pinot Noir fruit and the hint of a little further development. Lovely drinking over the next year. **All New World Pinot Noir producers should be made to taste this wine!** Didier Fornerol of Corgoloin, that no man's land between the Côte de Beaune and Côte de Nuits, is clearly a name to watch. A cask sample of his Côte de Nuits Villages at just over £100 a case was also looking very promising last week.

£81.08 a dozen from Howard Ripley of London SW18. ([See my tasting notes](#))

See other specialist Burgundy importers and try www.wine-searcher.com for importers elsewhere.

19/01/01

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Teófilo Reyes Crianza 1997 Ribera del Duero

Teófilo Reyes, now 80, was the man responsible on a day-to-day basis for the sumptuous deliciousness of the reds of Pesquera, the ground-breaking (literally) bodega of monomaniac Alejandro Fernandez just down the road from Vega Sicilia in Spain's high country near Valladolid. In 1993 he was persuaded by his sons to put his five decades of experience of Ribera del Duero to his own use by setting up his own, eponymous bodega. Although they recently planted 60 hectares of vines, until now these exciting wines have been made from grapes bought in 'because he knows where all the best vineyards are', according to one of his sons. Best wines for current drinking are the 1996 Reserva (which will still improve) and the 1997 Crianza which could already be enjoyed for its Ribera del Duero intensity of colour and lively fruit.

UK importer is Laymont & Shaw near Truro who claim to sell to [Averys of Bristol](#), D Byrne of Clitheroe, Fortnum & Mason,

Harrods, Hoult's, La Réserve, Lay & Wheeler, Laytons, Philglas & Swigot, Portland Wines, Reid Wines, Sandiway, Shaws, Sommelier of Guernsey and Villeneuve - but since their total allocation was about 400 cases, and 150 magnums of 1996 Reserva, there is no guarantee that each of these currently stock the wine. The 1997 Crianza should be about £14.50, and much better value than the specially boxed magnums which nudge £50.

For stockists elsewhere, see www.wine-searcher.com

26/01/01

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Roussanne Vieilles Vignes 1998 Châteauneuf-du-Pape Blanc, Château de Beaucastel

With all the hoopla about the 1998 reds in the southern Rhône, it has been easy to overlook the whites. In fact I spent the first 15 or 20 years of my wine writing life overlooking white southern Rhône in general, so fat and flabby did most of them seem. But, as everywhere else in the wine world, the last decade has seen a revolution and the proportion of appetising white wines now made here is suddenly hearteningly high. The leader of this revolution was this wine, which has been inspiring other growers down there for many a long year. It's made from the characteristic if nervy Roussanne grape traditionally associated with white Hermitage but is grown with such care, and low yields, that this particular, subtly oaked example has intensity as well as Roussanne's characteristic tang and lime scented, blossomy perfume.

This wine is not cheap (more than £30 a bottle) but it is unique and would make a great first course wine for a special dinner. Beaucastel export to Adnams of Southwold, Farr Vintners and Justerini & Brooks of London SW1, Lay & Wheeler of Colchester and others in the UK, but should be relatively easy to track down in other markets. Try www.wine-searcher.com for yours.

3/02/01

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Franciacorta Cuvée Annamaria Clementi, Ca'del Bosco

So you want a champagne for Valentine's Day? See UK Champagne deals for the details. Billecart Salmon rosé is one of the classics if you want it soppy and pink, but a quite stunning (white) alternative, if you could track it down, would be this top-of-the-line cuvéé from the hypertalented Maurizio Zanella in Franciacorta, Lombardy. Only small quantities of this wine are made so it may be difficult to locate (sorry about that, but I thought it worth making the point that Italy, or at least M Zanella, can produce fizz that knocks the socks off all but the best champagne). The 1993 is the current vintage, moving on to a particularly forward 1994. If by any chance you manage to find his Satèn cuvée, please try it and let me know what it's like. Gambero Rosso gave the 1995 vintage one of their coveted three-glass awards but I have not yet managed to get my hands on a bottle.

UK importers are Enotria of London NW10; NY importers are Peerless. Ca'del Bosco's fax number is (39) 0307 268 425. You could always try asking the winery in Italy for details of your local stockist.

11/02/01

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Terrarossa, Primitivo di Manduria 1997 Pichierri/Vinicola Savese £8.95

I was hesitating about whether to recommend such a monstrously individual wine as this, until I tried another Puglian Primitivo alongside it, Girelli's Canaletto. The latter tasted so affectedly, boringly, suavely 'modern' (as though special flavouring enzymes had been added to it and it had been subjected to a polish on an industrial scale) that it made me determined to bring its antithesis to your attention. The Pichierri family of Sava on the heel of Italy have surely not changed their winemaking methods in generations. The result is this rabid red wine at 14% alcohol chock full of bitter chocolate, acidity and tannin with all manner of heavyweight spicy aromas. It cries out for food and could be mildly tamed with a year or three in a cellar, but it gloriously characterful. Primitivo is the Zinfandel grape in its apparent homeland, often bottled apologetically with either too much alcohol and heat or tasting as though it has been cut with water to bring it

down to size.

This wine is imported into the UK by [Bat & Bottle](#) of Woodseaves, Staffordshire, tel 01785 284 495, sales@batandbottle-wine.co.uk and deserves attention elsewhere.

23/02/01

Comic Relief 2001

This week, a bumper helping of good buys although, I'm afraid, of interest chiefly to British wine lovers. It's all in a very good cause though. For the two weeks culminating in Red Nose Day, March 16 and the following weekend, almost all of Britain's most important retailers are donating 10 per cent of the retail price of selected wines straight to Comic Relief, the biennial UK fundraising effort that in 1999 attracted an amazing £35 million in donations towards worthwhile, longterm projects in Africa and the UK.

These wines should be clearly signalled in the store, on the shelf and on the list, and will carry a message reminding us all of the wisdom of sensible, rather than thoughtless, drinking.

I tasted a range of the biggest retailers' Comic Relief wine selections and can report on some of my favourites (although clearly there are already many more specific bottles chosen by the smaller retailers).

The best Comic Relief wine of all to have come to my notice is the quite delicious Fojo 1996, a superlative table wine made in the Douro. But Arthur Rackham are asking a penny short of £50 a bottle for it which is pretty steep. If you want an excuse to try it, now is the time when at least you can rationalise that £5 goes straight to Comic Relief. The price is a bit of a joke though, especially since [Bibendum](#) of London NW1 are currently offering their last bottles of this vintage at £32.70. Future vintages should be worth tracking. (This was one of the best wines tasted for my [Portuguese pocket book](#). To find your local importer email quintadofojo@clix.pt)

The best buy at Britain's biggest off licence chain (Victoria Wine, Thresher, Bottoms Up and Wine Rack) is Tatachilla's sweet and spicy Rhôneish Grenache/Mataro blend at £4.99. Most exciting wine from the country's biggest supermarket chain is Tesco's internet deal of Smithbrook's claret-like Cabernet/Petit Verdot blend from ultra-chic south Western Australia for £8.99 a bottle, or their bargain Côtes du Rhône Villages 1999 at just £3.99 which should be available in all stores.

Possibly best buys overall are two Languedoc reds. Unwins's Cabrières Rouge 1998 is usually £4.99 but this thoroughly characterful blend has been reduced to £3.99. Meanwhile Safeway's flatteringly full L'If Merlot/Carignan from Fitou country in the foothills of the Pyrenees is worth every penny of £4.99.

White wine lovers should head for Waitrose's ultra-crisp Le Pujalet 1999 Vin de Pays du Gers from armagnac country at just £3.49. Although perhaps this is a time for the argument that spending a bit more is the only decent option. Sainsbury's The Sanctuary Sauvignon Blanc 2000 at £5.49 from the reputable Grove Mill of Marlborough is certainly a much better wine than the Gascon. People who love the direct, grassy flavours of this sort of wine really love it. More subtly tuned palates might prefer Majestic's choice from Alsace, a very sumptuous Tokay Pinot Gris 1998 from Ribeauvillé at just £5.99.

Sainsbury's have also included one of my favourite wines in their Comic Relief selection: Los Robles Carmenère from Chile at £4.99. There are few more attention-grabbing mouthfuls of fruit. Even Australians were impressed when I presented this wine at a tasting in Sydney recently. And Spar has a riposte in the form of its own label South African Pinotage 1999, also at £4.99 and with real kerpow.

But buying these wines is only one of many ways for the wine lover to contribute to Comic Relief and help swell the specific Wine Relief coffers to a total in excess of the first time (1999) sum of £350,000.

Many bars and restaurants will be offering specific bottles the weekend after next, to coincide with Red Nose Day, from

which £1 will be sent direct to Comic Relief. Please choose these, or badger your local to get involved by contacting Briony Slot of Comic Relief on 020 7820 5545 or b.clot@comicrelief.org.uk.

7/03/01

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Meursault Genevrières 1999 Michel Coutoux

Michel Coutoux is clearly a name to watch in white burgundy. The son-in-law of the famous Michel Niellon in Chassagne-Montrachet, he has been quietly building a reputation for himself as a top quality negociant (an expression that would have been regarded as an oxymoron a decade or possibly even five years ago). His wines have the same sort of purity that has characterised the best Niellon wines and, even though 1999 was too prolific a vintage to be a great one for white burgundy, he has managed to etch extremely fine wines from it. His Narvaux at about half the price of his premier cru wines such as the Genevrières is arguably even better value. Lively and already delicious, it could provide tinglingly correct drinking over the next two or three years. The Genevrières is clearly made for the longer term with real density and nerve yet still the savoury citrus undertow. This should be seriously fine wine by about 2005. Get yourself known to your local importer as a Coutoux enthusiast as he is clearly on the way up (and made some Montrachet in 1999 too).

UK importer is Robert Rolls of London EC1 (0207 606 1166 or mail@rollswine.com) who has been offering this wine at £290 a dozen in bond.

19/03/01

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Sorrenberg Sauvignon/Semillon, Beechworth, Victoria, Australia

It takes a lot to make me really enthusiastic about a Sauvignon Blanc but this is an extraordinary wine that I came across on my travels in Australia in February. In fact Sorrenberg's dark, dusty, subterranean cellar just outside the historic town of Beechworth is the most Burgundian I have ever seen in Australia. And the man who runs it Barry Morey (descended not from Burgundian but German winemakers) is probably the closest Aussie to a Côte d'Or *vigneron*. He makes a wide range of wines and is best known for his Chardonnay and a strangely ambitious Gamay, but for me his blend of Sauvignon Blanc with about 20 per cent Semillon is his most interesting and successful wine - white burgundy in style and packaging but almost white Graves in flavours. I have tasted the 1997, 1998 and 2000, all of which have great intensity, creaminess and real body (far more concentration than many good white bordeaux). With age they take on a lanolin note and always wear their oak ageing discreetly. This is serious wine to serve with food - and not at all expensive if bought in Australia. Morey's real forte is growing perfect fruit and it shows.

According to wine searcher this wine is available only in Australia (at between £6 and £7) and from Ballantynes of Cowbridge in Wales www.ballantynes.co.uk at nearly £12. One or two of the Australian retailers will ship worldwide however.