

'Bargain' champagnes from British retailers

22 Nov 2004 by JR

Many UK retailers have special offers on champagne at the moment which brings prices down to thinkable levels. The biggest of all **Tesco** is offering 20 per cent off all of the 30 champagnes it offers until Sunday, 17 November - even on single bottles, and on top of this is retaining the five per cent discount on any six bottles bought. So this is the moment to pounce on any bottles you can find of Krug Grande Cuvée at £59.99 or Dom Pérignon 1993 (not as good as the 1995) at £55.99 if you were planning to buy either of these. Though, as usual, don't expect to find all their lines in every store. Biggest will be best in this case.

Arch-rivals **Sainsbury's** meanwhile have a three-for-two offer, but only three not desperately exciting champagnes, for two weeks from 13 November.

Oddbins are offering 15 per cent off single-bottle purchases as well as its more usual 20 per cent off six-bottle purchases on quite a number of champagnes until 24 November, but again you will have to hunt down specific wines at various different branches and anyway the prices are not especially competitive. The delicious H Blin 1996 that I raved about when I tasted it last April, and which disappeared extremely fast from their stores during a special promotion last spring, has reappeared on the Oddbins list, but firmly at £18.99 with no juicy discounts in sight except for the usual 12-for-11 offer.

Majestic also offers 20 per cent off all six-bottle purchases of champagne and sparkling wine but has some even better deals than this on many lines, most of which demand that at least two and sometimes three bottles are bought.

Meanwhile some of the independent retailers can actually offer a better deal than any of these much bigger operations. See [my earlier story](#) about **Lea & Sandeman** and note that even after putting up its prices of Billecart-Salmon NV quite considerably recently (doubtless at Billecart's insistence - see [purple prose](#)), **Lay & Wheeler** of Colchester can actually offer a much better per bottle price (£17.56) than Oddbins (£20.15) on full-case orders.

I have analysed as many of these offers as I can and have come up with the following best buys, though bear in mind that the Tesco prices only last till this Sunday. I have put the minimum number of bottles that have to be bought in brackets after each price.

- **Billecart-Salmon** £17.56 ⁽¹²⁾ Lay & Wheeler
- **Bollinger NV** £22.39 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco
- **Canard Duchêne NV** £11.99 ⁽³⁾ Majestic
- **Charles Heidsieck Mis en Cave 1997** £18.79 (1) Tesco
- **Duval Leroy NV** £11.33 ⁽³⁾ Sainsbury's
- **Dom Pérignon 1993** £55.99 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco
- **Dom Pérignon 1995** £59.99 ⁽²⁾ Majestic
- **Heidsieck Dry Monopole NV** £14.38 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco
- **Krug Grande Cuvée** £59.99 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco and £59.99 ⁽²⁾ Majestic
- **Lanson NV** £15.15 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco
- **Laurent Perrier NV** £18.25 ⁽¹²⁾ Lea & Sandeman (who claim their stock has extra age)
- **Moët & Chandon NV** £16.38 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco

- **Mumm NV** £12.99 ⁽³⁾ Sainsbury's
- **Perrier Jouët NV** £15.74 ⁽⁶⁾ Majestic
- **Piper Heidsieck NV** (widely discounted) £12.66 ⁽³⁾ Sainsbury's
- **Pol Roger NV** £18.95 ⁽¹²⁾ Lea & Sandeman
- **Louis Roederer NV** £19.99 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco, £19.95 ⁽¹²⁾ Lea & Sandeman
- **Taittinger NV** £18.74 ⁽⁶⁾ Majestic
- **Veuve Clicquot NV** £18.39 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco

Cheap and cheerful:

- **Oudinot NV** £9.99 Marks & Spencer till the end of the year
- **Barnaut NV** £11.95 ⁽¹²⁾ Lea & Sandeman or, some way behind in quality
- **Tesco Premier Cru NV** £10.39 ⁽¹⁾ Tesco

NV stands for non vintage, while means I think it a particularly good buy in terms of quality and its usual retail price.

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But perhaps the most useful and eye-opening gambit would be to buy a copy of this month's (November 2002) *Gault Millau* magazine which includes a fascinating survey of vintage champagne, from 1998 back to a few in the 1980s, including tasting notes, scores out of 100, addresses and telephone numbers and - most revealing of all - the price per bottle at the cellar door. Some of these prices, from the likes of Agrapart, Cattier, Pierre Gimonnet, Paul Gobillard and J-L Vergnon, put those above into perspective and are enough to set Brits off across the channel - terrorist alert notwithstanding - straight away.

See also my tasting notes on [top quality champagne](#) in purple pages.