Sticky Pudding Wine and other sweet sherries

30 Nov 2004 by JR

'Tis the season to be merry and forget that forthcoming visit to the dentist. This is the time of year in the northern hemisphere when temperatures plummet and a glass of something sweet and sticky at the end of a meal seems positively judicious. As far as I can see, no sweet wine is better value than sweet sherry at the moment and there is a particularly clever new one from the substantial Sanlucar bodega Barbadillo. **Sticky Pudding Wine** comes in a glamorous tall, thin, dark half-litre bottle packaged as though to appeal to the upmarket ice cream drinker (black and white close-ups and all that) and tastes extremely good for its £6.49. Apparently for the moment it is available only at the top 200 Sainsbury's stores in the UK (sorry, I will ensure that next week's wine is truly international) but I can assure you that it will not disappoint – unless you are looking for dry red of course. This is apparently an average of four or five years old – it already has a vaguely green rim to its tawny.

Sticky Pudding Wine tastes powerfully of caramel and rum and raisin ice cream – restrained it is not, though there is just a little note of astringence on the finish to stop the whole seeming just too sickly for words.

There are many other hugely satisfying sticky wines made, like this one, from raisined Pedro Ximenez grapes grown on the rolling white hills around Jerez, but many are much more expensive and most are sold in distinctly unprepossessing packages. Nevertheless the entire style is worth seeking out for warmth in low temperatures – and they can be delicious poured over good vanilla ice cream in high ones. Purple pagers should check out Penin's best-value wines for more recommended sherry bargains.

Even better value for British wine buyers is **Marks & Spencer's Rich Cream Sherry** from Williams & Humbert which has been reduced from £4.99 to £3.99 until 03 jan. This, as the name rather implies, is not the produce of dried grapes but is a solera-matured sherry which makes the price utterly ludicrous. Mind you, the bottle and label are extremely workmanlike… This is 17 per cent alcohol as opposed to the Sticky Pudding Wine's 19 per cent.

Having tasted my way dutifully through many other mass market retailers' sherry selections (most of them shrinking in number) I can say that at Waitrose the **Solera Jerezana Rich Cream Sherry** at £6.49 is very much livelier and more interesting than the Williams & Humbert Canasta Cream Sherry at £5.99.

There is a real attempt to inject some life into the sherry scene at the moment with the release and promotion of a number of superb vintage dated sherries. The Groucho Club had been the place where a number of them were shown on Friday last month. The room (and spittoons) was still heady with them the following Monday morning when we arrived to taste all those great dry Rieslings. It says something for Riesling that it managed to make its presence felt against all that competition from Jerez.