Champagne deals

11 Feb 2008 by JR

I know that only about a third of you are based in the UK so I apologise for focussing this week's wine recommendations on special offers specific to British retailers, but since Valentine's Day is so close, and since we have been discussing current deals here and here on our members' forum, I hope you will forgive me.

I've taken as my inspiration the very useful summary of current UK champagne offers shown on this relevant page of www.quaffersoffers.co.uk. As Jonathan Ebsworth of Headley Down has pointed out and Joe Asch of New Hampshire has confirmed, on paper Majestic's special deal on the excellent **Charles Heidsieck Mis en Cave NV** looks the best bet: £19.99 a bottle provided two bottles are bought. As members can see from the relevant page of our tasting notes search (currently being given a much-needed spring clean), both the Mis en Cave 2001 and, especially, the Mis en Cave 2003 are top quality wines which are certainly worth more than £20 a bottle in the (overpriced) British market.

However, word has it that it can be quite difficult to run the wines to ground in branches of Majestic, which are offering good discounts right across its champagne range from 5 Feb until Apr 7. Unfortunately you may be disappointed by the one that looks the best bargain on paper, **Duval-Leroy 2002** reduced from £31.99 to £15.99 if two bottles are bought. I certainly did when I tasted it blind in a substantial array of English sparkling wines interspersed with a few champagnes recently. It struck me as unappetisingly sweet and almost sickly, but the price is certainly right, and the reputation of the vintage is irreproachable. Label drinkers may well be perfectly satisfied.

However, you may be seeking a pink wine for your Valentine? I would consider **Fleury Organic Rosé NV**, which is on offer at Marks & Spencer at £23.99 (down from £29.99) until Mar 2. This is a serious wine from a very competent biodynamic grower, so if serving it to your beloved you can always digress on the subject of cow horns… M&S have also reduced the much-improved **Ayala Rosé NV** from £26.99 to £21.59. Or if you don't mind the slightly rustic style of champagne produced in the Aube you could go for the super-fruity, very fresh **Alexandre Bonnet Rosé NV** reduced from £18.99 to £14.99 at Waitrose.

These look the best bets to me. I tasted regular **Perrier Jouët Rosé NV, Perrier Jouët Belle Epoque Rosé 2002** and **Mumm Rosé NV** recently (they're all from the same Pernod Ricard stable) and thought the first was much the best value. Last autumn I was very taken by the beautifully pale pink, super-fresh **Tigress Sparkling Rosé NV Tasmania** from Hardys which larger Sainsburys stores have been selling for £13.99. Not champagne admittedly but perhaps a good bet for tigresses?

If it's sheer thrill and quality you're after, it's difficult to beat a **Larmandier-Bernier** champagne from Vine Trail or Lea & Sandeman and you might like to look at the results of my recent champagne blind tasting here, which suggests you scurry around looking for **Pol Roger 1999**. The 1999s are looking so, so charming at the moment – more forward than the 1998s. You might even think of shelling out £100 for two bottles of **Bollinger Grande Année 1999** at Majestic, or splitting the purchase with an equally lavish friend.