Majestic - what to buy and what to avoid

28 Apr 2008 by JR

Since my report in March on a tasting of Tesco's current offerings seemed popular, I thought I'd share my impressions of a representative selection of the wines currently on offer from Britain's most successful specialist wine retailer, Majestic. This is a chain of so-called wine warehouses – large sites which customers can in general park outside (the fatal failing of most high street wine stores). Minimum order is a dozen mixed bottles, which has helped Majestic notch up consistently impressive financial results. The company has also replaced Oddbins as most popular trainer of young people in the UK wine business.

Overall, Majestic is pretty consistent, with most branches stocking most lines – although their handful of Fine Wine stores (St John's Wood in London NW8 being a flagship) have a much wider selection of seriously fine wines. They have long been one of the easiest places to find mature red bordeaux and report that this policy is now paying off with signs that these wines are selling increasingly well. They are also relatively serious about burgundy. Energetic bargain hunters can save the UK duty of around £1.50 a bottle by crossing the Channel to buy at their branch in Calais.

I have marked with a * those wines that stood out for me at the end of the tasting.

Wines are listed in the categories used by Majestic since some of the offers refer to countries or regions rather than just to the wines described below.

All the offers mentioned in italics below run from 6 May to 28 Jul.

ITALIAN WHITES

Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% (excludes rosé, sparkling wines and wines at £13.99 or below). Italian Tasting Week in all stores 6–12 June 2008.

Cantina Beato Bartolomeo da Breganze, Pinot Grigio Superiore 2007 Breganze 14.5 Drink 2008

Strangely industrial nose. Very astringent palate though at least there is some fruit in the middle, but it's a sad fact that you can sell almost anything with Pinot Grigio on the label at the moment. 12.5%

£6.24 Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% £4.99

Settesoli, Fiano di Sicilia 2007 IGT Sicilia 15.5 Drink 2008

Rich, peachy nose with good acidity on the palate – somehow reminiscent of yellow English mustard. A first for me to find this aroma in a wine! Lots of character for the money. Tesco Finest Fiano at £5.99 comes from the same source but has half a degree more alcohol. I append my tasting note on it below for your interest. 13%

£5.99 Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% £4.79

*[**Tesco Finest* Fiano 2007 IGT Sicilia** 16 Drink 2008
Settesoli. Interesting rich mineral nose and then Sicilian sunshine. Lots of breadth. £1 cheaper this would be the bargain of the year… Pretty good honeysuckle flavours anyway – a good example of how broad the varietal range on offer in the UK has become. See the number of stories it's in. 13.5% £5.99 717]*

La Lancellotta 2007 Gavi 15 Drink 2008

Very attractively, florally scented. But a bit hard and phenolic on the finish unfortunately. Shame. 12%

£7.49 Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% £5.99

Marco Porello, Camestri 2007 Roero Arneis 15.5 Drink 2008-09

Intense aroma of some liquid soap. Lots of fruit and slight prickle. Pretty refreshing. Pretty chewy end but impressively long. 12%

£9.99 Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% £7.99

***Inama 2006 Soave Classico** 17 Drink 2008-09

Lovely lemony nose with real fruit on the mid palate. Great intensity of fruit with no sacrifice of delicacy or refreshment value. Seriously good wine – perhaps a little less tight than Pieropan's. 12.5%

£12.49 Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% £9.99

(See wines of the week.)

Feudi di San Gregorio Falanghina 2007 Campania 16 Drink 2008

Nutty nose – some minerals. Round and full – tastes more than 13% alcohol – with green apple hints. Not bad at all. Quite long. 13%

£9.99 Buy any 2 Italian wines save 20% £7.99

LOIRE WHITES

Loire Tasting Week in all stores 9-15 May 2008.

Dom du Salvard, Le Vieux Clos 2007 Cheverny 15.5 Drink 2008

85% Sauvignon Blanc, 15% Chardonnay. Water white. A little reduced and pretty stinky Sauvignon but certainly light and refreshing. At this stage a bit austere though it tastes as though it may be more mellow by August. 12%

£7.49 Buy 2 bottles save £1 £6.99

Caves de Pouilly-sur-Loire, Les Cascadelles 2007 Pouilly-Fumé 15 Drink 2008

Intense and very dry. Quite hard work but bracing! 12.5%

£9.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £7.99

Jean Pabiot, Prestige des Fines Caillottes 2006 Pouilly-Fumé 15.5 Drink up

Light and very fresh and pretty pure but I'd drink this fairly soon. 13%

£13.99

Dom Vacheron 2007 Sancerre 15 Drink 2008

£14.99

Water white. Fresh and correct but not expecially intense, Serviceable. 13%

Dom Vacheron, Les Romaine 2006 Sancerre 16 Drink 2008-09

Minerally and delicate – worth the premium on the regular bottling even though the price is really pretty high. Fine and lovely texture – green fruits and succulence. 13%

£22.00

La Grille Chenin Blanc 2007 Anjou 15.5 Drink 2008-09

Made by Gwenhaël Guihard. Very correct honey and flowers super clean nose with lots of fruit and just the merest suggestion of low temperature fermentation pineapple aromas. Great crystal clear acidity. Should last for more than a year. 11% GV

£5.99 Buy 2 bottles save £2 £4.99

Dom des Gauletteries 2007 Jasmières 15 Drink 2008-10

Fine but not as exciting or electric as some. 12%

£7.99

FRENCH REGIONAL WHITES

Terrasses de la Mer 2007 Picpoul de Pinet 14.5 Drink 2008

Pretty fierce acidity. Best drunk there... 12.5%

£5.99

Semas Sauvignon 2007 Vin de Pays des Côtes du Tarn 14 Drink 2008

Light and a bit weedy and metallic. Ok but no more. 12%

£5.99 Buy 2 bottles save £2 £4.99

Dom Cazal Viel, Cuvée Finesse Sauvignon Sur Lie 2007 Vin de Pays dOc 15 Drink 2008

Everyones doing Sauvignon Blanc! Good texture even if not the purest, raciest SB. A little heavy. 13%

£6.99 Buy 2 bottles save £1 £6.49

Paul Mas Estate Sauvignon Blanc 2007 Vin de Pays dOc 14.5 Drink 2008

Not much SB character on the nose and a bit heavy and oily. 13.5%

£7.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £5.99

Clos d'Yvigne, Princesse de Clèves 2007 Bergerac Sec 16.5 Drink 2008-09

50% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Sémillon, 20% Muscadelle. Quite complex rich nose with real interest. Tangy blend – maybe the Muscadelle adds a rich green grace note? Deep flavoured. Long. GV 13.5%

£7.99 Buy 2 bottles save £1 £7.49

Dom Paul Mas, Vignes de Nicole Chardonnay/Viognier 2007 Vin de Pays d'Oc 15 Drink 2008

60% Chardonnay, 40% Viognier. Quite big and heady – as though more than 13.5%. Slightly bitter finish. Not the most exciting example of this blend – needs a little more tension and depth. 13.5%

£8.49

Ch Ste-Marguerite 2007 Côtes de Provence 15.5 Drink 2008

Clear glass and a hint of pink honey colour. Very positive! Pretty big. Solid. Not the finest texture. 12.5% Organic

£9.99

Dom Ste-Rose, La Nuit Blanche Roussanne 2007 Vin de Pays des Côtes de Thongue 16- Drink 2008-09

Exciting herbal nose – quite a bouquet. Very slightly heavy on the palate. Oak stands out very slightly but it may well settle down… 13.5%

£9.99 Buy 2 bottles save £2 £8.99

WHITE BURGUNDY

Louis Jadot 2007 Macon-Lochê 15.5 Drink 2009

Light and fresh and savoury. A bit chewy on the finish still. Wait a while. 13%

£8.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £6.99

Dom Cordier, Terroir de Charnay 2007 Mâcon 16.5 Drink 2009-10

Clean and with fruit, off dry but great value! Some real intensity and lots of green fruit and freshness. Hint of minerality. Not a bad buy at all – little bit of butterscotch. Still very young though; note my suggested drinking date. 13.5%

£9.99 Buy any 2 Cordier wines save £2 £8

Christophe Cordier, Vieilles Vignes 2007 Viré-Clessé 16.5 Drink 2009-10

Green fruits and some floral notes on the nose. True wine with integrity though a bit austere at present. 13.5%

£12.99 Buy any 2 Cordier wines save £2 £11.99

Jean-Louis Chavy 2006 Puligny-Montrachet 16 Drink 2008-10

A bit mealy on the nose but good vibrant richness on the palate. Not a silly price. Could be useful. 13%

£19.99 Limited Majestic Allocation

Dom Jomain, Les Referts Premier Cru 2005 Puligny-Montrachet 16.5 Drink 2007-11

Fruit just a little tired. ??On the nose though there is nice creaminess on the palate. And quite a bit of alcohol! Not bad. You could probably find better value elsewhere but in extremis this would not be a bad choice. 13.5%

£30.00

SPANISH WHITES

***La Serrana Macabeo 2007 Carifiena** 15.5 Drink 2008

From Terral of Zaragoza. Fantastic value. Lots of fruit and very clean and fresh. Screwcap probably helps but really good for the money! 13% GV

£3.39

Crego e Monaguillo Godello 2007 Monterrei 15 Drink 2008-09

Not bad – smooth and green but not desperately zesty or serious. 13%

£8.99 Buy 2 bottles save £3 £7.49

CHILEAN WHITES

Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20%. Chilean Tasting Week in all stores 23-29 May 2008.

Castillo de Molina Sauvignon Blanc 2007 Elqui Valley ??

??Serious reduction problem! 13.5% Screwcap

£7.49 Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20% £5.99

***Errazuriz, Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2007 Casablanca Valley** 16 Drink 2008

Very fresh, clean fruit with delicacy and not too much pungency or residual sugar. Good delicate bracing zesty refresher. 13.5% Screwcap

£9.99 Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20% £7.99

Casa Marin, Cipreses Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2007 San Antonio Valley 16 Drink 2008-09

Richer aromatically than the Emazuriz. Lots there – seems more successful and refined than the last lot of Casa Marins (2006s??) I tasted. Still a little pinched on the finish. Maybe give this a few months? 14.5% Screwcap

£12.49 Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20% £9.99

Winemakers Lot, Llanuras de Camarico Lot 7 Chardonnay 2007 Limari Valley ??

Not much nose and a bit chunky – dark marmalade? – on the palate. 14%

£7.99 Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20% £6.39

Cono Sur, Vision Riesling Block Quitralman 2007 Bio-Bio Valley 15.5 Drink 2008-09

High alcohol for a Riesling! The back label cites volcano, snows, red clays and that on the most cursory of readings! Adolfo Hurtado's baby in the far south of Chile. Does smell like (young) Riesling. Maybe very slightly too sweet? Or perhaps it needs this for the acid? It's still a little boudoir-ish but I'm sure it will get there. It's certainly not that expensive. Looking forward to see those vines age. 14% Screwcap

£7.49 Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20% £5.99

Cono Sur, Vision Gewürztraminer Block Las Colmenas 2007 Casablanca Valley 16 Drink 2008

The nose of this seems a tad more convincing than the Riesling. Lychees and nicely dry and confident on the palate. I'd love to see very slightly more intensity – lower yields? 13.5% Screwcap GV

£7.49 Buy any 2 Chilean wines save 20% £5.99

ALSACE WHITES

Philippe Zinck, Riesling Eichberg 2006 Alsace 15 Drink 2008-10

A little too pinched and austere for comfort. 12.5% Screwcap

£11.99

Philippe Zinck, Gewurztraminer Eichberg 2006 Alsace 15.5 Drink 2008-09

Rich, fat, broad. A little too sweet for comfort. 13% Screwcap

£11.99

ROSÉ

Ch Cazal Viel, Vieilles Vignes Rosé 2007 St-Chinian 16 Drink 2008

Syrah, Grenache, Cinsault. Some herby interest. Good delicacy of texture – real fruit there and the acid balance is right. Not too sweet and not painfully tart. Well done! 13%

£6.49 Buy 2 bottles save £3 £5.49

***Clos d'Yvigne Bel-Ami Rosé 2007 Bergerac** 16.5 Drink 2008

By far the most interesting rosé of this lot – full of ripe fruit but not sweet. Real lift and interest. A complete wine. 13%

£7.99 Buy 2 bottles save £1 £7.49

BEAUJOLAIS

Buy any 2 Beaujolais wines save 20%. Beaujolais Tasting Week in all stores 9-15 May 2008.

Georges Duboeuf 2006 Beaujolais-Villages 15 Drink 2008-09

Pretty tart but good fresh fruit attack. 12.5%

£6.24 Buy any 2 Beaujolais wines save 20% £4.99

Ch de Maladrets 2006 Beaujolais-Villages 14.5 Drink 2008

Not that pure – tastes a bit chaptalised up. 12.5%

£7.49 Buy any 2 Beaujolais wines save 20% £5.99

Ch de Pizay 2006 Morgon 16 Drink 2008-11

Dark crimson and punchy – quite beefy. Wait till July before enjoying. 12.5%

£7.99 Buy any 2 Beaujolais wines save 20% £6.39

Louis Jadot 2007 Beaujolais-Lantignié 16 Drink 2008-09

Pretty suave and smooth. A good short-term drink with crunch and substance. 12.5%

£8.69 Buy any 2 Beaujolais wines save 20% £6.95

LOIRE REDS

Tasting Week in all stores 9–15 May 2008.

La Grille Pinot Noir 2006 St-Pourçain 15.5 Drink 2008

Pale, even slightly orange! Very very light and pretty tart – I think I'd enjoy it more if it were sold as a dark rosé, funnily enough. Zesty acidity. GV 12%

£5.99 Buy 2 bottles save £2 £4.99

Charles Joguet, Les Cinq Climats 2007 Chinon 15 Drink 2009-10

Bright crimson. Pretty marked acidity but frank crunchy fruit. Slightly rasping. 12%

£9.99 Buy 2 bottles save £2 £8.99

Charles Joguet, Les Varennes du Grand Clos 2001 Chinon 15 Drink 2006-08

Great to find a wine with this much age on it at this price. Really developed nose – interesting, meaty, yet fragrant. Lots of chew and acidity. Bit of a curiosity, fruit drying out. 12.5%

£13.99

RED BURGUNDY

Cave des Hautes-Côtes, Les Mouchottes 2006 Bourgogne Haut-Côtes de Nuits 14.5 Drink 2009?

Very light and tart indeed. I think I'd prefer La Grille. 12.5%

£9.99 Buy 2 bottles save £2 £8.99

Dom Maillard 2005 Savigny-Lès-Beaune Rouge 16.5 Drink 2008-12

Healthy crimson. Sleek, well-melded ripe nose. Very flattering. Coming into its own. Should not disappoint anyone. True, slightly rustic pure fruit with good structure. 13%

£15.99

Dom Pascal Lachaux, Vieilles Vignes 2004 Volnay 15.5 Drink 2009-12

Looks quite evolved and pale. Very light nose. Sweet and gentle on the palate but with quite a bit of 2004 rigidity still. Not sure this will ever be super charming but should delight with the right food. 13.5%

£19.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £17.99

Pascal Lachaux Premier Cru 2001 Gevrey-Chambertin 16 Drink 2008-12

Healthy ruby – not that dense. Light, evolved nose with a bit of dried leaves on the finish. Not vigorous. Some Gevrey weight on the palate. Very chewy end but not quite enough fruit to counterbalance the tannins. A bit uncomfortably austere. Its days as a fruit bomb are certainly over! 13.5%

£23.00

NEW ZEALAND REDS

Coney Pizzicato Pinot Noir 2006 Martinborough 15 Drink 2008

Sweet nose and relatively simple with a dry finish. Where's the fruit? 14% Screwcap

£15.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £13.99

Quartz Reef Pinot Noir 2006 Central Otago 16.5 Drink 2008-10

Interesting, succulent fruit – just slightly too much oak alas but certainly the fruitiest Pinot in this selection with some real gentleness on the palate and interest and tertiary, rather mushroomy, aromas on the nose. Long. Well made. 14.5% Screwcap

£15.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £13.99

FRENCH REGIONAL REDS

***Matassa, Romanissa 2004 Vin de Pay des Côtes Catalanes** 17 Drink 2008-12

70% Grenache Noir, 15% Carignan, 10% Mourvèdre, 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Very ripe nose and then nice balance and interest on the palate. Firm schisty mineral element runs through it but it's really quite refined. Well done! Very refreshing finish. Not cheap though. 13.5%

£17.99 Buy 2 bottles save £6 £14.99

RED BORDEAUX

Diane de Belgrave 2005 Haut-Médoc 16 Drink 2008-11

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot. Already looks evolved at the rim. Nice round nose – ah yes! 2005! A bit leaner than you might want from this vintage with the merest hint of rusty nails. Relatively light weight but lots of pleasure for the money. 12.5%

£10.99

Les Hauts de L'Arrivet Haut-Brion 2003 Pessac-Léognan 16 Drink 2007-09

50% Merlot, 50% Cabernet Sauvignon. Very fresh and refreshing fruit. Well balanced with a certain suavity. Not a knockout drop – just a very good claret for easy drinking. Only a slight burn on the finish. GV 12.5%

£9.99

Ch Greysac 2005 Médoc 14.5 Drink 2007-09

Bit simple and spindly for a 2005. Very angular and hollow. Diane de Belgrave and Les Hauts de L' Arrivet Haut-Brion are better value. 13%

£11.99 Buy 2 bottles save £4 £9.99

Ch Beau-Site 2003 St-Estèphe 16.5 Drink 2007-09

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot. Bright crimson. Sweet and full of plump fruit. No excessive dried tannins on the finish. Relatively succulent for a 2003 – good short term drinking and another sign of success in 2003 in St-Estèphe. 13%

£17.99

CALIFORNIA RED

Esser Vineyards Merlot 2006 California 14.5 Drink 2008

Esser are based in American Canyon. Sweet and reasonably tart so not sickly but there's really not that much there in the middle. 13.5%

£8.49 Buy 2 bottles save £3 £6.99

CHAMPAGNE

***Esterlin Brut NV Champagne** 16 Drink 2008

From CVM of Mancy. Lively and quite intense on the nose. Quite intense. Not excessively green or sugar. Lively - good value at the lower price. Dense. An Epernay co-op with a website trading as Esterlin. 12%

£29.99 Buy 2 bottles save 50% £14.99