40+ sure-fire fizzes

25 Nov 2010 by Jancis Robinson/FT

Below are my recommended fizzy buys for the holiday season. Prices and stockists given are for the UK and I have tried to sniff out the best prices and the bargains, but those living outside the UK may like to research prices and stockists on wine-searcher.com.

Those in the UK should check the latest offers at quaffersoffers.co.uk where Mel Jones MW keeps us up to date with the frenetic discounting of the biggest retailers. They tend to change their prices and special promotions for fizz all the time. M&S for instance have just decided to change the timing of their 'Buy six bottles and save 25%' offer so that it runs from now until next Wednesday 1 Dec.

Pink champagne tends to be overpriced so I have not included any. You will also note that I have not, with some guilt, included any English fizz. Its quality is beyond doubt, as I noted in some detail here, but while champagnes are being so aggressively discounted, and while it is made on a small scale and with relatively high costs, it is difficult to find examples that look like great buys.

Selections are listed upwards in price, though do check current offers and prices. And please note that prices given are for single-bottle purchases. Some retailers, generally those without bricks and mortar premises, plus Majestic, may insist on a minimum purchase of six or 12 mixed bottles. Many of them offer substantial discounts for quantities of six or 12 unmixed bottles.

Waitrose in Partnership NV Cava
From Castillo Perelada. Fresh nose and bone dry with none of the vegetal notes sometimes associated with its Catalan grape ingredients Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada. Pretty good value at the reduced price. Neutral but dry, innocuous and not aggressively frothy.
£6.99 to 7 Dec (usually £8.99) Waitrose

Miguel Torres Pinot Brut Méthode Traditionnelle NV Chile
Gently fizzy southern hemisphere copy of a Blanc de Noirs champagne. Not much evidence of age but well made with a light touch.
£11.99 Paul Adams Fine Wine of London SE21, Partridges of London SW3, Portland Wine of Sale, Weetons of Harrogate

Laytons Brut Réserve NV Champagne
Presumably priced so as to lure people into Jeroboams shops. From own-label specialists Maison Burtin. Competent. Dry enough and not hard work - just not very interesting but there are no faults except dullness.
£14.95 (magnums £32.95) Jeroboams

Waitrose Brut NV Champagne
Excellent depth on the nose - presumably a lot of sweet - or hard? - talking on the part of Waitrose's champagne buyer Dee Blackstock MW went into this blend. Relatively rich and solid but there is a lot there on the nose. Great value at the reduced price.
£15.99 to 7 Dec (usually £19.99) Waitrose

Gonet NV Champagne
A real surprise - a mature champagne from a grower in Avize, available online from Tesco. It has nowhere to go but is lots of fun for the moment. Some positive apple and autolysis notes in this 50:50 Chardonnay/Pinot Noir blend. Only 6 g/l residual sugar.
£108 for 6 (£18 each) Tesco By The Case

Sainsbury's, Taste the Difference 2004 Champagne
Very aggressive and racy Duval-Leroy blend dominated by Chardonnay from some pretty smart villages. Quite dense and still quite youthful. Quite impressive length.
£19.99 Sainsbury's

Pierre Moncuit Grand Cru Blanc de Blancs NV Champagne
Very direct attack and very pure, fine Chardonnay. I keep waiting for quality to dip at this family domaine but it just doesn't seem to happen. Neither complex nor for keeping, but would be great value for any reception in the next few months. Very tight bead and good length.
£22.95 (usually £25.95) Bancroft

Marc Chauvet Brut Sélection NV Champagne

Note that this all-2005 premier cru blend is much superior to the very similar-looking Tradition bottling at £19.99. Four years on the lees. Very direct, quite complex, confident attack. Tight bead. Zesty and very fresh. Quite a substantial wine.
£22.99 The Real Wine Company

Waitrose Brut Special Reserve 2002 Champagne
Very tight lemon-cream nose. Very mouthfilling and with 2002's integrity. A tiny bit sweet but very satisfying. Great value at the reduced price.
£22.99 from 8 Dec (usually £27.99) Waitrose

Clos de la Chapelle, Instinct NV Champagne
From a group of independent growers from premier cru village Villedommange. 60% Pinot Meunier, 25% Pinot Noir, 15% Chardonnay.
Very pretty nose with mouth-filling fruit and delicate mousse. Nothing in excess though it's certainly not the driest champagne you'll find. Just the sort of fizz you'd be thrilled with at a party.
£23.50 The Sampler

Laurent-Perrier NV Champagne
Quite complex and a good price for a *grande marque* champagne from an independent. Very tight. Dense, tightly laced. Long and rich. Profit from Laurent-Perrier's strong desire to sell! Long and quite complex.
£23.95 Jeroboams, £25 Majestic

Lancelot-Royer, Cuvée de Réserve RR Blanc de Blancs NV Champagne
All Chardonnay from the village of Cramant. Gun smoke on the nose. Very pure and rewarding. Quite light and flirtatious but not insubstantial. Very refreshing. A great aperitif. Super clean, brisk finish.
£28.50 The Sampler

Varnier-Fannière Brut Zero Blanc de Blancs NV Champagne
Old Chardonnay vines, traditional methods. Very dense on the nose. This could be a good start for someone who wants to discover bone-dry champagne as it is not austere but lively and reverberant. Very firm and interesting.
£30.50 The Sampler

Pol Roger, Louis Roederer & Bollinger NV Champagne
Great prices for Champagne's top family-owned *grandes marques* are reduced yet further if 12 bottles are bought. Waitrose have Roederer at £27.99 until 7 Dec.
£25, £27 & £28 Majestic; £29.95, £31.95 & £31.95 Lea & Sandeman.

Taittinger 2004 Champagne
Smoky nose, off dry, please-all. Very pretty, lightly sweetish. Complete. A meaty, satisfying drink. Good value at this reduced price.
£30 Majestic

Dehours, Les Genevraux Extra Brut 2004 Champagne
Very pale. Pretty, delicate, well-balanced nose. Then quite a 'wild flower'-tasting palate. Very earnest and serious bone-dry wine with real personality - light years from most big-brand stuff. Should drink well for another three or four years.
£33.50 H2Vin

Ulysse Collin, Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs NV Champagne

Heady liqueur sort of nose - very arresting! Some oak and lots of intense fruit - so different from the champagne norm. For those used to downing champagne without much thought, this sort of wine, from a Selosse disciple, is rather salutary. Very persistent.
£34.95 Vine Trail

Eric Rodez, Cuvée des Grandes Vintages NV Champagne
Blend of 2000 and 2002. Complex, no malolactic fermentation, all oak, very tamped down but explosive on the finish. Eric Rodez used to make wine at Krug and all of his own bottlings are very impressive.
£46.45 Little Wine Club, Derbyshire

André et Jacques Beaufort 2002 Champagne
Biodynamic producer and a great vintage. 80% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay, 9 g/l dosage.
Hardly fizzy but very obviously Pinot perfumed. Hint of marzipan - also very reminiscent of a fine, lightish Côte de Beaune red burgundy. Really very classy and complete indeed.
£46.50 The Sampler

Larmandier-Bernier, Vieille Vigne de Cramant Grand Cru Extra Brut 2004 Champagne
Tiptop wine as long as its name. Fine, complex nose. There's a bit of putty on the nose and this style nicely splits the difference between super funky (Ulysse Collin?) and user friendly. Dry, very tightly laced and intense. Nervy. Good stuff!
£48.95 AG Wine, Lea & Sandeman, Vine Trail

Georges Laval, Brut Premier Cru NV Champagne
Lovely zest and direction - very pure and targeted. Very delicate and slightly appley (fermented in old oak). Very pure indeed - obviously artisanal. Excellent.
£50 The Sampler

Juillet-Lallement, Special Club 2004 Champagne
Fine and scented in a rather fine-white-burgundy way - Puligny? A well-judged, not excessive, fizz and a very attractive, complete drink. Very refined. Long. Just 1,500 bottles produced.
£51 The Sampler

Laherte Frères, Les Clos NV Champagne
An unusual multi-varietal blend of all seven grape varieties allowed in champagne (Christmas quiz question?). Complex, well-balanced nose with real depth. Hedgerow smell. Very unusual. I think any champagne lover would be intrigued by this.
£58.40 The Sampler

Bollinger, Grande Année 2000 Champagne
Classy and classic. Big, bold and bone dry.
£60 The Wine Society, £65 The Vintage House, El Vino

Jacquesson 2000 Champagne
Dense and grown-up on the nose - there is real interest here! A bit of oak influence that borders on sour cooking apples but I'm sure it's intentional. Very dry, dense finish. A real statement of a wine. Maybe best with food? Very intense and full of wild life.
£75 Berry Bros

Dom Pérignon 2002 Champagne
Despite the surprisingly high quantities produced, I have never been disappointed by Moët et Chandon's luxury bottling, or *cuvée*, and the recently released 2002 is one of the best vintages I can remember.
£78.50 www.winestudio.co.uk (Constellation's wholesaler Matthew Cark's online retail site), £105 Lea & Sandeman or less if bought by the case from fine wine brokers

Bollinger, Grande Année 1990 Champagne
A really mature champagne from an impeccable family concern. Holding up well.
£130 Averys, Nickolls & Perks

Salon, Blanc de Blancs 1996 Champagne

A particularly magnificent example from this fine champagne vintage. Very subtle.
£327 Berry Bros, also available in cases of six from fine wine traders

Champagne-loving members of Purple pages may like to see our collection of specific tasting articles about champagne:

Bollinger RD back to 1959 Jul 2010
Current pink Champagnes Apr 2010
Champagne - current releases Mar 2010
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Pol Roger back to 1966 Nov 2009
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