

Top 25+ strong and/or sweet

15 Dec 2011 by Jancis Robinson/FT

Go on - treat yourself!

Wines are listed upwards in price per cl within the following three styles. Bottles are 75 cl unless otherwise stated.

SWEET

Val d'Orbieu, Taste the Difference NV Muscat de St-Jean-de-Minervois

Great value. Really fresh, different, explosive and not at all industrial. Like grape cordial from the hills of the Languedoc. One of the finest southern French Muscat appellations. 15%
£4.79 for 37.5 cl Sainsbury's (454 stores)

Rustenberg, Straw Wine 2010 Coastal Region

Blend of 56% Viognier, 41% Chenin Blanc and 3% Crouchen laid out to dry and concentrate the sugars on straw then aged in barrel for five months. Lovely tangy bargain. Massive richness and then apple skins. Great, exciting balance. Drink this Christmas. Clean and bumptious. 10.5%
£9.99 for 37.5cl Majestic (until end January)

Seifried, Sweet Agnes Riesling 2010 Nelson

Super-fresh and tangy from the north west of New Zealand's South Island. Sugars concentrated in dried grapes. Very fresh acidity. Would wake you up after a nap by the fire.
£13.99 for 37.5 cl Waitrose (2 stores and online)

Les Lions de Suduiraut 2009 Sauternes

AXA Millésimes' Ch Suduiraut has been producing reliably exciting and superior Sauternes for many years now, and has been supplying British retailers with some fine bargains with the offcuts. This is the new, official diffusion line, and very delicious it already is too. Great value. 13.5%
£14.99 for 37.5 cl Averys

Grati, Villa di Monte Vin Santo 1995 Chianti Rufina

This may not be the very finest Vin Santo ever - it might even be a little old and certainly isn't the sweetest (Felsina Berardenga's at Waitrose may be that) - but it is wonderful to find any example chez a mass retailer. This one is delightfully mature and nutty. 17%
£16.99 for 37.5 cl Marks & Spencer (125 stores)

Crociani, Vin Santo 2004 Montepulciano

Lovely combination of long oak maturation aromas and racy dried-grape sweetness. Not that sweet but wonderfully energising. Serve with cheese? Nuts? Certainly not with anything very sweet. 17%
£19.49 for 37.5 cl Waitrose

Royal Tokaji, Betsek Prima Classis Aszú 6 Puttonyos 2005 Tokaj

Hungary's most famous wine with massive sweetness, and acidity. Luminous apricot tawny. Tastes of apricots and dusty velvet. Very bracing and zesty, a wine I found impossible to spit out even at the end of a very long professional tasting. Only. 9.5%
£55 for 50 cl Waitrose (181 stores and online)

DRY AND STRONG

Emilio Lustau, Solera Jerezana Fino del Puerto NV Sherry

Ridiculously cheap for such a smoky, fresh, light, bone-dry aperitif. From a classic white, chalky Andalusian vineyard. 16.5%
£8.49 Waitrose (276 stores and online)

González Byass, La Canoa Palo Cortado NV Sherry

Very pale tawny. Much muddier than the average Palo Cortado with some surely very old stock in here but of real interest to sherry lovers. Just off dry. Could be great at the table. Ridiculous price for a 12-year-old wine. 20%
£11.99 Sainsbury's (368 stores)

Maestro Sierra Fino NV Sherry

Fine, interesting, classic dry aperitif from a particularly traditional sherry bodega now being imported into the UK by Indigo Wine.

£14.99 Handford Wine, halves £7.99 Noel Young

Equipo Navazos, I Think Manzanilla NV Sherry

Bottled in October 2010 and still going strong. Very fine introduction to Manzanilla - the lightest, driest, most marine style of sherry - from the La Bota team.

£10 for 37.5 cl Goedhuis

González Byass, Dos Palmas NV Sherry

New series of top-quality, bone-dry sherries bottled straight from individually selected casks. Dos Palmas is best value but the Tres Palmas has even more age and even more tingling authenticity.

£15.95 for 50 cl Tanners, £15.99 Hawkshead, £16.95 Lea & Sandeman, £17.95 Berry Bros

Barbeito, Single Harvest 2000 Madeira

Greenish golden wine aged for nine years in barrel by Madeira's gifted and innovative winemaker Ricardo Diogo. Look out for his special Lote and Madeira Collection bottling, too. Dry and tangy but far from austere. A real shot in the arm. So dramatic it's almost medicinal! 19%

£18.99 for 50 cl Waitrose (21 branches)

Fernando de Castilla, Antique Amontillado NV Sherry

Elegantly packaged, dry, nutty classic. Great with cheese and ham as well as for warming up those who venture outside over the holidays. 19%

£24.50 for 50 cl Woodwinters, £25.99 Noel Young

SWEET AND STRONG

Emilio Lustau, Solera Jerezana Rich Cream NV Sherry

Eight-year-old Oloroso and Pedro Ximénez sherries have been blended to make this slightly dusty but very bracing sweet, polished wine with a refreshingly dry finish and a hint of treacle. Great balance between age and sweetness. A completely ridiculous price! Really bracing, not heavy at all. Sweet and polished with a clean dry finish. 20%

£8.49 Waitrose (236 stores and online)

Symington, Waitrose LBV 2006 Port

This full-throttle port is a steal! They must be mad to be selling it at this price. Concentrated prunes and chocolate and lots of fun on the nose. Some subtlety and satin on the palate. Just fabulous for the money. 20%

£9.99 Waitrose (257 stores and online)

Bleasdale, The Wise One Tawny 10 Year Old NV Langhorne Creek

South Australian blend of Grenache, Shiraz and Verdelho aged for 10 years in small oak casks under this historic winery's hot tin roof. I'm so glad someone has taken notice of this bargain and brought it into the UK for us to enjoy. Bright orange. Very sweet and satisfying for the end of Christmas lunch. Very very slightly syrupy with lots of tropical flower aromas. Like fermented crystallised rose petals. Fun! But quite dry and pungent on the end. 18.5%

£10.50 The Wine Society

Fontanel, Ambré 1999 Rivesaltes

The product of another raid on some of the world's stocks of mature sweet wine - in Roussillon this time. Heady and raisiny yet fresh. Caramel and rancio flavours. It would be great with bitter chocolate. Miraculously fresh, racy and dry on the finish. Quite a bargain considering its age and interest value. 16%

£14.95 Stone, Vine & Sun

Mas Amiel, Vintage Reserve 2008 Maury

More truly fantastic value from Roussillon. Dark crimson. Rich, glowing liquorice nose. Very mellow, attractive wine with no rough edges. Almost like claret somehow in that it is so well balanced! Long and burnished. Still decades of life in it even if it is drinkable now. Pungent finish. 16%

£17.25 Gerrard Seal, £21.95 Handford, £12.95 for 37.5 cl Lea & Sandeman; also available from Exel Wines, The Perfect Cellar, Bottle Apostle, Vagabond

Quinta do Noval LBV 2004 Port

The first late bottled vintage port from this excellent estate made entirely from Quinta's own grapes and it is the real

deal. How are the port producers going to persuade people to buy proper vintage port, which needs decades in the cellar, when such immediate treasures are to be had for a fraction of the price?

£17.99 Cambridge Wine, Hanslope Wines of Milton Keynes and others

González Byass, Noé Viejo 30 Year Old Pedro Ximénez NV Sherry

Dark and lustrous. Brown with the tell-tale green rim that indicates prolonged (30+ years) ageing in wood. PX grapes make the stickiest, blackest (though not strongest) Montilla and sherry of all. Not nearly as refreshing as the Rich Cream - though a quite different style. Raisiny and great poured over ice cream. All the flavours of Christmas pudding without the cooking. 15.5%

£16.99 for 37.5cl Waitrose (2 stores)

Symington, Taste the Difference 12 Year Old NV Port

Rich, peppery and pure orange peel on the nose - nothing industrial about this. Great stuff! Just a tad expensive next to the sherries. Although **Berry's Vintage Port 2007**, also made by the Symingtons, is £45... 20%

£34.99 Sainsbury's (457 stores)

Taylors 20 Year Old Tawny NV Port

Lustrous rose red. Slightly lacking freshness on the nose but only very slightly. Certainly mellow after long wood ageing. Not that sweet and very tangy. Refreshing and lively on the palate. 20%

£22.95 for 37.5 cl Berry Bros, £49.95 for 75 cl Roberson

Graham 2000 Port

Proper vintage port. Obviously ideally one would be drinking one's 1963s but should you have none in your cellar, the 2000s are probably the youngest vintage you could think of broaching. Polished, dense, explosive and opulent. 20%

£45.95 Exel Wines, £47.25 Lay & Wheeler and many others

Chambers Rosewood, Grand Muscat NV Rutherglen

Dark brownish orange. Lively macerated raisin flavours with a hint of Fisherman's Friend (original flavour). Dry finish. Well made - and well matured. Very persistent with a hint of rose petals. 18.5%

£32.50 for 37.5 cl Great Western Wine, £34.13 Winebear.com, £35.95 Noel Young

More stockists at wine-searcher.com.