This year's top 100+ - strong and/or sweet

21 Dec 2012 by Jancis Robinson/FT but this is longer

The *Financial Times* has room for only 25 strong and/or sweet wines but, as I pointed out when describing last week's wine of the week, I found it so difficult whittling down my choices that I have included all 33 of them here.

The big retailers may not always have the best prices for fine table wines but they do in the main for sweet and strong wines. Indeed, some of the prices for ports and sherries look verging on the suicidal. I can but suggest that you take advantage of them, and of all the second and third wines from top Sauternes châteaux that now proliferate on British supermarket shelves. Since so many of us are in temperatures and the season most conducive to drinking strong and sweet wines, it would be equally foolish to pass up this seasonal opportunity to indulge in wine styles that deserve to be drunk far more regularly. Wines are listed in increasing price per centilitre; standard bottles contain 75 cl.

STRONG AND DRY

Barbadillo, Tesco Finest Manzanilla NV Sherry
Very fresh and nervy indeed. Lots of Atlantic in here! Great stuff. So much iodine you could put it on a wound. 15%
£4.50 until 1 Jan (£5.90 usually) per 50 cl Tesco (475 stores)

Lustau, Sainsbury's Taste the Difference 12 Year Old Amontillado NV Sherry
Very pale tawny. Rancio nose - burnt noisette butter - the result of ageing in cask for all those years. Very firm and vibrant. Super tangy. Fresh and revitalising. 19%
£7.99 per 50 cl Sainsbury's (401 stores)

Hidalgo, Pasada Pastrana Manzanilla NV Sherry
Most unusual sherry from a single vineyard. Toasted, reminds me of that Japanese tea made of toasted rice. This would match so many foods - ham, cheese, nuts, broths, noodles - so happily. 15%
£12.99 Sainsbury's (89 stores)

Sánchez Romate, Cayetano del Pino Palo Cortado NV Sherry
Estimated age 12 years. Pale greenish yellow. So clean, fresh and mature! Absolutely fantastic value. That price is for a full 75 cl. 20%
£13.50 The Wine Society

Lustau, Manzanilla Pasada NV Sherry
Gloriously, appetisingly tangy, aged manzanilla. A guaranteed appetite stimulant. 17%
£7.49 per half bottle (37.5cl) M&S

Equipo Navazos, I Think Manzanilla en Rama NV Sherry
Bottled April 2012. Very, very pale tawny - deeper than the average Manzanilla. Very positive and lively and dense. Burnished! The lot bottled 18 months before is even better so there is no hurry to drink this. Basically any wine from this producer that specialises in bottling the contents of hand-picked casks is worth pursuing. 15%
About £11 per half bottle Uncorked, Hedonism Wines, Philglas & Swiggot

Gonzalez Byass, Dos Palmas Fino NV Sherry
The best value of the four unfltered gems just released. Intense wine on the cusp of nuttiness and putty-like. Really quite exciting. Lots of saltiness and yet a smooth texture and great appetising freshness and tension. Good value. See this background to the annual release of these wines.
About £17.50 per 50cl Lea & Sandeman, Berry Bros, Harvey Nichols

Williams & Humbert, As You Like It Amontillado NV Sherry
From a forgotten solera, apparently. Very tangy, off dry, nutty and easy to love - much more interesting than cheaper sherries labelled Amontillado. Delightfully tangy. 21%
£22 per half bottle The Wine Society, £23.99 Waitrose (243 branches)

SWEET

Val d'Orbieu, Sainsbury's NV Muscat de St-Jean-de-Minervois
Big, bold, sweet and opulent - almost brazenly sweet in fact but look at that price! This vin doux naturel is not fat but finishes clean and fresh. 15%
£4.99 per half bottle Sainsbury's (461 stores)

Tacchino NV Moscato d'Asti
With its light grapiness and extreme freshness, this is almost irresistible. It's so refreshing and even has a rather stylish label. Serve it to those to whom anything stronger would be unthinkable. 5.5%
£10.50 Bancroft

Dom des Forges 2010 Coteaux du Layon Chaume
This is ridiculously inexpensive for a gorgeous sweet Loire Chenin Blanc made by successive pickings by hand. Green leaf flavours. Thick and syrupy but great value. Finishes with bracing freshness and bite. 11.5%
£7.99 per half bottle Waitrose (48 branches)

Ch Cantegril, The Society's Exhibition 2009 Sauternes
Really very fine and *echt* indeed. There is evidence of noble rot but this traditional blend of Sémillon with Sauvignon Blanc is not too sweet. You could enjoy this treasure from Denis Dubourdieu with so many foods! Long. 14%
£18 The Wine Society

Ch Tirecul La Gravière, Les Pins 2010 Monbazillac
Smooth texture, wonderfully flattering. I might not like it so much next to the top bottling Cuvée Madame but it's gorgeous now! Sweet but appley and refreshing. 12%
£12.75 per 50cl Lea & Sandeman

Ch Haut-Bergeron, L'Îlot de Haut-Bergeron 2010 Sauternes
Another second wine from a Sauternes château with a lovely lemon streak in all that luscious richness. Very sweet. Vines are 60 years old. 13.54%
£9.99 per half bottle Marks & Spencer (400 stores)

Ch Guiraud, Sainsbury's Taste the Difference 2010 Sauternes
This own-label wine comes from one of the top properties in Sauternes and is basically a very good off cut. Tastes of the most stimulating pear juice. Not for the very long term, but open and appealing. 14%
£12.99 per half bottle Sainsbury's (376 stores)

Ch Pierre-Bise, L'Anclaie 2004 Coteaux du Layon Beaulieu
So sweet and gorgeous and easy to like. Strange this did not sell out long ago. Needs drinking as the acidity is relatively low. 12%
£16.95 per 50cl Lea & Sandeman

Ch Liot 2009 Sauternes
Second-drawer property but a very sweet vintage. Lively, thick and flattering. Such *fun*!! 14%
£13.49 per half bottle Waitrose (36 branches)

Tamar Ridge, Kayena Vineyard Limited Release Botrytis Riesling 2010 Tasmania
Amazingly botrytised! Rich and unspittable at a completely silly price. This long-winded wine has won prizes galore in Australia and is refreshingly low in alcohol. 9%
£13.99 per half bottle Waitrose (23 branches)

Poggio Bonelli 2007 Vin Santo del Chianti
Pale orange Tuscan speciality. The sensation is one of delicate burn and long ageing in small oak barrels. It's not that sweet but is so clean! Lovely toasted almond flavours. Stunning. 16%
£19.95 per 50cl Lea & Sandeman

Ch Suduiraut, Waitrose 2007 Sauternes
Not the top wine of Ch Suduiraut but a great combo of freshness and maturity. Nice savoury finish. Salty. Dare I suggest

this would be a good foie gras wine? It's certainly not the sweetest but it has a certain beauty. (See also **Loins de Suduiraut 2009** at about £15 a half from Averys, Berry Bros, Cambridge Wines.) 14.1%
£15.49 per half bottle Waitrose (264 branches)

Mullineux, Straw Wine 2011 Swartland
Super rich but glorious. Dried apricots but in lush mode rather than the very tight, crisp mode of Tokaj (see Royal Tokaji's delicious **Betsek 2007** from Berry Bros). You (almost) taste the sweat that went into this. Long and rich and nervy. 12%
About £18.50 per half bottle Domaine Direct, Berry Bros, Swig, Slurp, Handford

STRONG AND SWEET

Williams & Humbert, Sainsbury's Taste the Difference 12 Year Old Pedro Ximénez NV Sherry
Dark brown with a pale green rim. 'PX' is almost like thick prune syrup. Dentists beware! Great for both cooking and dribbling over ice cream (a great substitute for Christmas pudding). Tingly and excellent value**.** 18%
£7.99 per 50 cl Sainsbury's (378 stores)

Henriques & Henriques, Full Rich NV Madeira
Smoky with the most amazing energy and vigour. So refreshing you could drink it with anything. Excellent value. (Their **10 year old Sercial** , £17 per 50 cl Wine Society, is a great, dry pick-me-up.) 19%
£9.99 per 50cl Waitrose (183 branches)

Sandeman, LBV 2007 port
Tasted soon after poor Patrick Sandeman of Lea & Sandeman's demise, so it was a special treat to see how rich, pruney and gorgeous this wine from his family firm is. Dense with a dry finish. Great value. 20%
£14.99 until 2 Jan, usually £19.99 Waitrose (262 branches)

Quinta do Noval 10 Year Old Tawny NV port
Lovely sweet transparent liquid redolent of roses. You could enjoy this with a wide range of foods from very sweet puddings to, especially, hard cheese.
£15.19 until 2 Jan Waitrose, otherwise around £19 Tanners, Robersons, Cambridge Wines, Oxford Wine Co, Luvians, Fine Cheese Company of Bath

Fontanel 2008 Maury
Bitter chocolate, dried cherries. Finishes dry and interesting. Perhaps a bit more luscious. Just great value - and not heavy. Roussillon in southern France is a treasure trove of vins doux naturels like this. 16%
£16.50 Stone Vine Sun

Symington, Tesco Finest 1994 port
Treacle and dried herbs and lots of subtle throat-soothing stuff. A little harsher than a great vintage port but it's a seriously silly price. Apparently Tesco selected this years ago and the Syms keep supplying new shipments. 20%
£18 until 1 Jan, usually £22 Tesco (834 stores)

Barbeito Boal Reserva NV Madeira
Pale mahogany. Rich, transparent and satisfyingly nutty with at least five years' cask ageing from one of the world's most trustworthy winemakers with a huge range, some of them individual cask bottlings. 20%
About £13 per 50bcl Lea & Sandeman, Roberson

Graham's 10 Year Old Tawny NV port
Vigorous rose red with more intensity than Sainsbury's own-label version, also from the Symington family. It has much more excitement, vibrancy and spine. Firm and pungent. Great stuff! Needs food/cheddar? 20%
£19.99 Sainsbury's (422 stores)

Taylor's, Quinta de Vargellas 2001 port
So fresh and peppery! Gosh this is good - more claret than the lusher Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos, very much in tune with these wine farms' characters. Compare and contrast with any 2001 red bordeaux. At this price you would be swimming in the shallows whereas these two wines are top of the port tree.
£25 Majestic, £28.60 Tanners, £29.45 Waitrose, £33.99 Fortnum & Mason

Graham's, Quinta dos Malvedos 2001 port
A stunning single quinta port, the sort that is ready before 'proper' vintage port. Polished, glamorous. Rich liquorice character with a dry finish. Douro in a bottle. So clearly a classic wine. Vigorous. 20%
£26.37 Sainsbury's (455 stores)

Quinta do Noval Colheita 1997 port
Deliciously intense, nutty tawny from a single year. Very limited quantities have been released but I loved the dried fruit and nut (but no chocolate) quality of it. 21.5%
£35.99 SH Jones, Simply Wines Direct

Fonseca 1985 port
Proper vintage port that has matured in bottle for a quarter of a century. Round, rich and firm. Liquorice and freshness. Slightly straighter-backed stablemate **Taylor 1985** is also at Tesco and Majestic for the same price. 20%
£85 Waitrose Wine Direct

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