

NEIL PHILLIPS – THE WINE TIPSTER

OXFORDSHIRE LIMITED EDITION MAGAZINE – NOVEMBER 2014

CIRCULATION: 20,537



oxfordtimes.co.uk **The Wine Tipster**

Christmas is coming ...

Neil Phillips previews the best festive fizz

With Christmas deadlines looming, October is the month for the national retailers to hold their press tastings for drinks journalists and once again there were plenty of impressive wines including the bubbly range from Marks & Spencer.

Fizz is obviously a very important part of any retailer's festive business and the wine-buying team at Marks & Spencer have been working very hard behind the scenes to continue to provide an exciting sparkling offering, not only achieving this in the bottle format, but also with their new selection of magnums too!

Magnums make great presents and are also a stylish way to share and enjoy at parties or with like-minded fizz fans over the festive period.

If you want to impress, then Sussex's Ridgeview Blanc de Blancs Magnum 2000 at £75, M&S online www.marksandspencer.com has incredible depth of flavour, complexity and crisp acidity, which is a hallmark of aged English Sparkling.

Bring out the oysters or serve like a white Burgundy with steamed or grilled fish because this is a fizz for food pairing.

Keeping to the larger format, the Champagne Laurent-Perrier Magnum 2004, £95, and the Champagne Oudinot Brut Tradition Magnum NV, £50, both



M&S online, are very smart choices. In bottle, Cava Heretat El Padruell Brut NV, Spain, £8, M&S, is an excellent dry, citrus, soft and creamy style, which is very good value.

I can also recommend the dry, rounded and fruity Prestige Rosado Cava Brut NV, £10, M&S.

From Champagne, the Charles Mignon Brut Premier Cru NV, £32, M&S made from 75 per cent Pinot Noir and 25 per cent Chardonnay has really good structure and is ideally matched with crab, prawns or chicken.

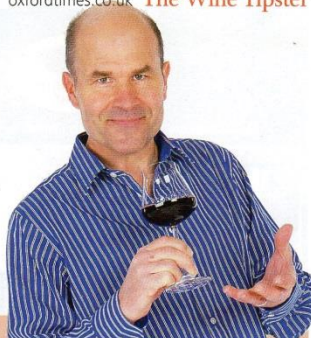
For a vintage choice, Oudinot 2007 £31, M&S is excellent value for an elegant Blanc de Blancs vintage Champagne which is perfect Christmas drinking.

From Tasmania, try the high level and stylish Josef Chromy Sparkling NV, £20, made from Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Riesling or from South Africa the renowned Graham Beck The Rhona Brut Rosé NV, £15.

Next month I will be including some of the Christmas offers from our local merchants and national retailers.

theWineTipster

Lionel Carreau Cuvée Prémembles Brut NV, £36, from M&S



This month's Top Tipples

Prosecco Magnum NV abv 11 per cent, Masottina, Prosecco, Italy, £19.99. Stockist: M&S

Prosecco's popularity rightly is not waning and winemaker Alberto Fabibretti from the Masottina winery has produced a stylish, smooth, fresh, creamy style that will be a winner at any yuletide party. The magnum format will add to the occasion too.

Lionel Carreau Cuvée Prémembles Brut NV, abv 12 per cent, Champagne, France, £36. Stockist: M&S.

In my Christmas basket will be this elegant, floral, citrus and beautifully balanced Champagne from the underrated Côtes des Bar region. Made from Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and unusually 20 per cent Pinot Blanc Vrai (Pinot Meunier is the usual partner in a non-vintage blend) this is the perfect aperitif-style for the festive period.

Les Nivières 2012, abv 12.5 per cent, Saumur, Loire, France, £8.99. Stockist: Waitrose.

Made from 100 per cent Cabernet Franc, a high quality grape variety that is finally getting the attention it deserves, this medium-bodied red is supple with pipe tobacco, berry fruit flavours and fresh fruit on the finish. Impressive.

Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Pic-St-Loup 2011, abv 13 per cent, Languedoc-Roussillon, France, £9.99. Stockist: Sainsbury's.

Winter is coming and this is just the kind of well-made, spicy, herbaceous, dark and fruity red that should be in your wine rack. Well-priced.

Gonzalez Byass Matusalem Oloroso Duce Muy Viejo VORS, abv 20.5 per cent, Jerez, Spain, £19.99 per 37.5cl. Stockists: S.H. Jones, The Oxford Wine Company, Waitrose.

This stunning sherry, which gets its dark colour from 30 years of ageing in sherry butts should be on every Christmas table and for that matter all year round! Matusalem Oloroso has aromas of dark chocolate and prunes, with delicious, rich, complex, nutty character on the palate. A lovely match with Alex James' delicious Blue Monday.

Chilling out at the Oxford Wine Café

I WAS reminded last weekend in that I am a big fan of the wine bar format as I spent Friday evening responsibly imbibing in Whighams Wine Cellars in Edinburgh's West End.

Fortunately In Oxford you can do the same at the Oxford Wine Café in Summertown, which is part of the Oxford Wine Company, an independent company, who have wine shops in Oxford and Standlake, as well as a significant wholesale wine business.

With a large number of wines available by the glass it is worth being inquisitive as you give the Riesling or Gewürztraminer a try or discover the underrated grape variety Cabernet Franc, whilst on Sunday evenings you can relax with a glass of fizz listening to live jazz.

Another attraction is the range of tasting events featured at the Oxford Wine Café, the

Oxford Shop, as well as their wine-paired dinners at the Cherwell Boathouse, which are all organised by the charming and energetic Theo Slood, who over the years has really developed and expanded this part of the Oxford Wine Company's business.

Among the forthcoming tastings that caught my eye are at the Oxford shop Around the World with Master of Wine Patrick McGrath on Thursday, November 27, and the Champagne Gosset Dinner at the Cherwell Boathouse on December 2. Theo also runs his informal Thirsty Tuesday and Thirsty Thursday tastings on a monthly basis at the Oxford Wine Café and Oxford Wine Shop.

You can find out about all the tastings at www.oxfordwine.co.uk and pop along to the Oxford Wine Café, 38 South Parade, Summertown, Oxford, 01865 236959 www.oxfordwinecafe.co.uk