

U3A December Wine Report – Recommendations for Christmas.

Well, the good news is that the group 'met' in November. We agreed to taste six wines to help us make our Christmas recommendations, and can report as follows:

- of our three whites, the first, a 2019 French number, the **Denis Marchais Chenin Blanc** (2019; 11.5%) from Majestic found little favour, especially at £8.99. For a basic Italian white wine Lidl's **Pinot Grigio Garda** (2019; 12%) was generally preferred. It was felt that this offered better value for money (£4.99) although remaining somewhat unexceptional. By far the best of the whites tried however was number three, the **Waimea Sauvignon Gris** (2019; 14%) from Majestic, pricey (for us!) at £9.99 but genuinely appreciated by most of the group. This New Zealand Sauvignon Gris packs a punch at 14% and can be confidently recommended either as an aperitif or alongside fish or white meats with its touch of minerality and 'long refreshing finish'.
- moving to our dessert wine we checked out Majestic's **De Bortoli Botrytis Semillon** (2016 and a surprisingly light 10%). As a possible alternative to Sauternes to accompany the Christmas pudding this impressed: sweet but not too heavy, reasonably priced at £9.99, and bringing 'a striking balance of fresh citrus characters and refreshing acidity.' Given that Majestic continue to offer free delivery on six bottles or more, we can give this one a definite thumbs up.
- my intended 'pieces de resistance' then both fell rather flat: of our two reds, Majestic's Spanish **Cune Rioja Reserva** (2016; 14%) was described by members as 'unpleasant'; its claim to be 'Rich. Warm. Vanilla-spiced' fell on deaf ears and the unanimous message was 'avoid this one'. Even worse, not often do we taste a premier cru wine at our gatherings, but this appellation failed to save our Lidl **Saint-Emilion Grand Cru** (2017; 13.5%). Perhaps the fact that Saint-Emilion alone is allowed to use this description for a wine which simply been made 'with extra care' might have warned us, given a surprisingly low price of £10.99; the group's red-wine lovers pronounced this example a flop – 'nothing to distinguish it', and even 'I don't like it' in one case. Looking back over the red wines we have tasted I would suggest looking instead at Majestic's 'own brand' **The Guv'nor Red**, a full-bodied Spanish Tempranillo which our group members tend to re-order again and again. At £6.99 this would do very nicely with the main Christmas day lunch, without breaking the bank.

I have received the following additional recommendations from our group members:

'I recommend my favourite Sauternes which is Carries de Rieussec at £19.95 from Berry Bros. However Tesco do a really good one too at £12 in their finest range. Red wines - well so many but Paulliac, and Chateau Musar are my favourites though expensive. My current 'find' is Rabello from Portugal with a champagne type cork. It's an absolutely bargain at £6 from the Co-op (in Middleton and maybe Barney).'

'Cono Sur Bicicleta Viognier 14%

"Bright with apricot, peach and orange aromas together with a fresh stone fruit palette..... good with white meat, sea food, salads and a perfect match for chilli heat."

-I really like this oneinteresting complex citrussy flavours.

Silver Ghost Sauvignon Blanc 2020 12%

"Originating in the central valley, the silver ghost is said to haunt the old deserted mining towns now left

to the elements....quite literally.

Great with lighter meals, grilled fish and Mediterranean vegetables for example, this delicious wine is sourced

from the most well known Chilean growing region, the Central Valley.

Juicy pineapple fruit with crisp acidity and a clean finish"

-This one is very easy to drink even without food.

I still like the Villemarin Picpoule de Pinet I told you about in a previous email, also from Majestic.

And, Morrisons (£9?) had a rather good New Zealand sauvignon blanc rose called Mud House 13%

(Marlborough 2019) - says " Refreshing floral aromas with berry and spice. The palate exudes fresh tropical

Sauvignon Blanc flavours complemented by hints of berries from the addition of Pinot Noir before finishing

refreshingly with spice and acidity"

- I like the spiciness, and again, very easy to drink with or without food.'

Finally, the Times is running a 100 'best wines' supplement in two parts over the next fortnight. This week featured 50 reds. I have not had time to try these before the Forum deadline, but the following caught my eye from the '£6.50 and under section' and I would be happy to try any or all of these all hopefully available at local supermarkets:

- Aldi Exquisite Selection Argentinian Malbec – 'a bargain at £5.79'.
- M&S Le Malbec du Pays d'Oc' – 'M&S pulling their socks up at £6.00'
- Morrisons the Best Western Australian Cabernet – 'great with turkey' & 'reduced to £6.50'.

Then if you are willing to splash out a little more I like the look of:

- Aldi 2019 Pinot Vigilante Central Otago Pinot Noir – '13.5%: oodles of splendid plump .. fruit for £9.99'
- Co-op 2018 Robert Oakley Semaphore Series Cabernet Sauvignon – '14.5%: absolutely delicious, vibrant ... for £8.00'

I note that the Times 50 does not include any of Sainsburys wines (and Tier Three makes shopping at Waitrose difficult in Teesdale!) so my attempts to remain totally even-handed have not been fully successful. Even so, I hope the above contains a few helpful suggestions and that you all enjoy a restful and safe Christmas.

Tim Meacham.

