

OUR WINES

CHAMPAGNE

Champagne Franck Bonville, Blanc De Blancs Brut non-vintage Grand Cru, Champagne, France

Grape Variety: Chardonnay 100% · £49

Well, it's not often a comparative unknown (at least in the UK) Champagne comes up, let alone at such a great price! Michael Edwards, one of the great wine critics, rates Franck Bonville amongst the top ten domains for quality in his book *The Finest Wines of Champagne*, mentioning its 'distinguished expressions of great Chardonnay'.

This family-owned estate was created in the years after 1945, and now the vineyards extend to over 20 hectares in the most sought after villages of Avize, Oger and Le Mesnil – some of the most valuable agricultural land in the world.

We have had the pleasure of working with Olivier Bonville (the third generation at the helm), for many years and, while all non-vintage Champagnes should be drunk in the year or two after bottling, I can vouch for the longevity of his vintage wines having sampled the extraordinarily rare 1959 at the estate. A real treat and still a delicious wine!

PROSECCO

Valdellovo Anno Zero Extra Dry Prosecco Superiore di Conegliano Valdobbiadene DOCG

Grape Variety: Glera 90%, Bianchetta and Verdiso 10% · £28

We searched high and low for an outstanding Prosecco – there are lots of ordinary ones – and found this. Owner Benedetto Ricci, assisted by his wife Clotilde, comes from a local family steeped in winemaking history, and, combined with technical expertise, is completely fanatical about quality in all respects (even the superb risotto he cooks is made from a rice matured for 8 years to develop the flavour). He's our kind of man!

Valdellovo, meaning 'valley of the wolf', is a private family domain of 10 hectares on the steep hillside vineyards in the heart of the best delimited sector. The winery was founded in 2000, hence the name Anno Zero for their Prosecco Extra Dry, a fresh and beautifully balanced wine with peachy and floral notes and deep underlying minerality that sets it apart from the cheap Prosecco DOC produced at lower altitude to the south and east.

ROSÉ

Château Mourgues du Grès, Les Galets Rouges Costières de Nimes AOC Rhône, France

Grape Variety: Syrah, Grenache · £20.80

The label of this enticing Rhône features the sundial on the façade of the old farmhouse at Château Mourgues du Grès, with the Latin inscription 'sine sole nihil' meaning 'nothing without sun' (I stand open to correction from any classics scholars out there). The Collard family preside over the estate, located just 5 miles west of the River Rhône. The clay and limestone soils are covered with large flat sandstones known as 'galets' that reflect the sun's heat up on to the vine, typical of the soils of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Here though, despite being only a few miles away from that famous region, along with the dry cold Mistral (north wind), there is also the moderating sea wind that cools the vines on summer nights. The combination of climate and minerality maintains a freshness ideal for the Syrah grape (also known as Shiraz in the New World), giving wines with ripe black fruits and spice. I've heard tell from those in the know that this was recently spotted on the wine list at The Savoy... and if it's good enough for them... Just in case you were wondering, (and why wouldn't you be?!), the vineyards of Châteauneuf-du-Pape are one of the few areas in the world where it is illegal to land UFOs. Bad luck for aliens but good news for our cellars!

RED WINE

Château Planères de Saint Jean Cotes de Roussillon

Grape Variety: Grenache, Syrah, Carignan · £17.50

The Roussillon is French Catalonia, and Planères is a large vineyard in the village of Saint Jean-Lasseille, close to France's border with Spain and just 10 miles from the Mediterranean coast. Not a bad deal! Gilles Jaubert, along with his brothers Claude and Guy, produces satisfyingly ripe and generous red wines from a blend of Grenache, Syrah and Carignan.

The balance and freshness owes much to a moderating sea influence and to soils consisting of ancient river gravels and clay over a cool limestone bedrock. The lightness of these well-drained soils encourages the vine roots to dig deep for nutrients and moisture, giving the wine of a finer texture than is common in the area. It is great to drink on its own as well as with grilled meats.

Château Labastide-Haute, Malbec, Cahors AOC, Cahors, France

Grape Variety: Malbec 80%, Merlot 20% · £19.50

Labastide-Haute, also known as Clos La Coutale elsewhere, has enjoyed a presence on the wine list of some of the great French restaurants, including Auberge d'Ill, Taillevent and Le Doyen. That's some serious prestige for a wine at this price, and we're sure you'll see why when you taste it.

The Malbec grape variety, popular in Argentina, is originally from the Cahors region where the River Lot winds west towards Bordeaux. Just to complicate matters Malbec is also referred to as 'Cot' in this region. Labastide-Haute comes from the finest vineyard sector on the south bank, produced on a 60-hectare private estate which dates to before the French Revolution.

Philippe Bernède is the sixth generation of his family to make wine here, and blends 20% of Merlot to give extra aromatic dimension and suppleness. This is fresher in style than many Argentine Malbecs, offering a more approachable option for party drinking, whilst also exhibiting the plummy fleshiness of the Malbec fruit which we all love.

Ever the innovator, Philippe is also responsible for producing a phenomenal selection of corkscrews of extremely high quality. I was packed off to uni with mine (obviously with clear priorities!), and it still makes an appearance at every one of our unmissable feast menu evenings... that's 15 years of solid use and counting!

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Colline Teramane DOCG LE Murate, Fattoria Nicodemi, Abruzzo, Italy

Grape Variety: Montepulciano 100% · £23

Elena Nicodemi and her brother, Alessandro were both enjoying successful city careers when they unexpectedly inherited their father's estate in 2000. They took the decision to abandon their urban lifestyle in favour of a voyage of discovery in wine (and olive oil). The estate was founded by Elena and Alessandro's grandfather in the early 20th century. He was a potter who inherited the land as part of his wife's dowry and, forced in a new direction, developed a love of the land and its produce. This passion for the wine they produce is fully engrained in every bottle, following the ethos that it is the vines themselves that dictate what route is taken in the cellar. The hillside vineyard is 5 miles from the Adriatic coast in the superior sector of Colline Teramane. Olive groves and wild herbs have a natural aromatic affinity with the deeply coloured Montepulciano grape, indigenous to the region. Under the Mediterranean sun the variety is slow to ripen on the limestone slopes and retains a fresh fruit acidity and minerality to sustain the vivid blackberry and plum flavours.

A third of the wine spends a few months in small oak barrels before being added to the rest in vat, after which it all ages in large oak casks before bottling. The result provides an excellent accompaniment to barbecued lamb and other grilled meats. As with the Soave from Tamellini, the consultant oenologist here is Paolo Caciorgna.

Quinta de Padrela, Douro

Grape Variety: Tinta Roriz, Touriga Nacional · £24.50

The Douro region is a World Heritage site, and you'd understand exactly why once you've experienced the views from Quinta da Padrela. The estate is owned by Teresa Rodrigues and her husband Pedro Francisco, a consultant oenologist in his own right, with the vineyards set in a perfectly exposed natural amphitheatre in the Alto Douro. The region is so named because of the River Douro which, from its source in northern Spain, where it is known as the Duero, (think of Ribera del Duero). The high altitude and schist soils offer intense red and black fruits with fresh acidity and elegant tannins, with floral violet, spice and herbal aromas developed by time in barrel.

The Douro is a region more commonly associated with Port production, but actually produces about the same amount of wine, which lately has been claiming its own identity. In fact, Quinta da Padrela's production all went to make Port until 2002; now Teresa and Pedro are among the leading lights in table wine production. Tinta Roriz, the local name for Tempranillo (the most common grape variety in Rioja), is planted with other indigenous varieties such as Touriga Nacional.

Rioja, Pago de Larrea, Caecus Rioja Crianza, Spain

Grape Variety: Tempranillo 100% · £28

The Larrea family started this small winery (for Rioja) relatively recently in 2002, although there has been winemaking pedigree in the family for over 4 decades.

Father, Luis, along with his son Luis and daughters Rosa and Maria, produce wine strictly from their vineyards only (buying in grapes from other growers is common elsewhere in Rioja), and can therefore control every aspect of the wine-making process. Their aim is to produce a wine which combines the best of both classic and modern styles of Rioja, looking for the finesse of the former with the weight of fruit and intensity of the latter.

Crianza is the quality level of the wine, based on strict local laws which dictate the minimum aging term prior to release. In this case the wine rests in oak barrels for a year, followed by a further year in bottle before being made available for consumption.

Contino, Rioja Reserva, Spain

Grape Variety: Tempranillo 85%, Graciano 10%, Mazuelo 2.5%, Garnacha 2.5% · £28

A benchmark Rioja Reserva, Contino is a single estate within the highly respected C.V.N.E group. A high Graciano (grape variety) content gives incredible freshness to the wine which is often found lacking in the bigger, more oaky, style of wine which is prevalent in the region. It is matured in a mix of French and American oak and bottled after two years before spending another two years in Contino's underground cellars.

The estate is steeped in history; the 'contino' was the officer in charge of a guard corps responsible for the protection of the royal family from the 15th century, and rumour has it that Saint Gregory, the patron saint of vineyards, passed through the land on which this property lies, hence his depiction in the winery's logo.

An exceptional match to grilled and roasted red meats.

WHITE WINE

Château Les Miadoux Blanc, Bergerac sec AOC Bergerac, France

*Grape Variety: Sauvignon Blanc 47.5%, Semillon 47.5%,
Muscadelle 5% · £17.50*

Gérard and Nathalie Cuisset acquired Château des Miaudoux in 1987 as an agricultural operation specialising in the production of pruneaux d’Agen, the finest of culinary prunes! It wasn’t long however before they saw the potential for vines and started the process of establishing their vineyards on the rolling limestone hills south of the Dordogne river at Saussignac.

The white grape varieties of Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon (blended in equal proportions with 5% Muscadelle) are planted on north facing slopes which allows for slower ripening and a fine balance of acidity. The result is a wine of fresh aromatic intensity with notes of white fruits, citrus and flowers, mineral base, and an appealingly ripe texture.

Market gardening is also now a successful side-line to the business. It takes some serious energy to make all that work!

Soave, Azienda Agricola Tamellini, Veneto, Italy *Grape Variety: Garganega 100% · £19.50*

Just as I was entering the wine trade a mere 10 years or so ago, Soave was on the cusp of becoming something more than under-achieving plonk from north-east Italy. In truth a handful of producers (Tamellini amongst the first – for many years their grapes had simply been supplied to the local cooperative) were in the vanguard of technical and qualitative development which had started around the mid-nineties, and all of their hard work was finally coming to fruition.

Soave itself is an ancient walled town nestled in the stunning landscape between Verona and Vicenza in northern Italy, and it is close to the town that the best of the vineyards bearing its name are found.

Garganega is an indigenous grape variety which the Tamellini brothers, Gaetano and Pio, grow organically on their 21-hectare estate. The Italian word ‘soave’, meaning ‘gentle’, is perfectly suited to the character of the wines they make; there is no use of oak at all, however the finished wine shows a lovely deep lemon gold colour, reminiscent of good white Burgundy in both appearance and palate-weight and structure.

Gaetano and Pio are advised by one of Italy’s most gifted oenologists, Paolo Caciorgna.

Sauvignon Blanc Vieilles Vignes, Domaine Baron, Touraine AOC

Grape Variety: Sauvignon Blanc 100% · £20.80

The stony slopes descending to the River Cher in Touraine are so calcareous that walking between the rows of vines you almost trip over the fossils.

This was once a sea bed, and the limestone rock formed of trillions of fossilised crustaceans imparts a notable mineral and saline character to this stunning old-vine wine – more than a match for many of the delicious Sancerre and New World Sauvignons we tasted in our quest for a top-class Sauvignon.

Samuel Baron takes care of the vineyard he inherited from his father using biodynamic practices, and opting for low yields that give concentrated fruit with typically fresh gooseberry, blackcurrant bud and elderflower aromas, supported by appetising acidity and a deep mineral purity thanks to those crustaceans.

Pouilly-Fuissé, Clos Reissier Domain Perraton Frères, Burgundy, France

Grape Variety: Chardonnay 100% · £42.50

We’ve been looking for a Chardonnay to restore balance to an otherwise Sauvignon-heavy list for a fair while, but it’s certainly been worth the wait! I’m afraid there’s always going to be a bit of premium to pay for one of the world’s great white wine styles, however we have settled on a stunner which offers phenomenal relative value from the beautiful Mâconnais vineyards on the southern borders of Burgundy.

Brothers Christophe and Franck Perraton produce this delicious Chardonnay from vines which have an average age of 60 years. The original cellars were built in 1849 with a new expansion completed in 2014.

The wine exhibits a beautiful pale yellow colour with mineral notes and hints of citrus and white stone fruit on the nose. Smoothly textured with great finesse and subtle power. Very fine indeed.

Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, Auntsfield

Grape Variety: Sauvignon Blanc 100% · £28

Having sourced one amazing Sauvignon (see Domaine Baron) we got slightly carried away and added another.

Auntsfield Estate was founded in 1873, making it the oldest vineyard in Marlborough, all thanks to the vision of a gentleman called David Herd. At a time when everyone else was thinking ‘sheep’ he looked at the landscape and thought ‘wine’.

Auntsfield is now in the safe hands of the Cowley family, where Luc is the winemaker and his brother Ben is the viticulturist. Keeping true to the past they have uncovered David Herd’s original cellar – the very first of its kind – which is proudly displayed on their labels.

“Our single vineyard wines come from one place. Our vineyard. We know these grapes and how they will express themselves in our wine.”

“This is benchmark stuff. Freshly scented, it is unusually weighty and sweet-fruited, in a non-herbaceous (not at all grassy) style, with vibrant melon/lime flavours, showing a touch of complexity and a mouth-wateringly crisp, lasting finish.” Michael Cooper, Oct. 2015

Rated #1 Sauvignon Blanc in tasting of 238 NZ Sauvignon Blanc in tasting of 238 NZ Sauvignon Blancs, Cuisine Magazine, 2013

2016 rate 98/100 points in *Decanter Magazine*, 2017

