

Wine offers for 2023



Château Musar: A Star in the East

Wine has been produced for centuries in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, where conquering armies such as those of the Crusaders rampaged across "the Holy Land," traded from the cities of Tyre and Sidon on the coast. The Hochar family who own Château Musar have traced their ancestors to such days. However, it was not until the twentieth century that they emerged on the international wine scene when a 20-year-old Gaston Hochar founded Château Musar. This was at a time when Lebanon was under French colonial rule and during the Second World War, when many French soldiers were stationed there, Gaston became very friendly with a Major Ronald Barton, who owned Langoa Barton, in Bordeaux. Ronald was to become a devoted friend and mentor to Gaston, and his family. After the Second World War, Major Barton encouraged Gaston to send his son, Serge, to study Oenology at Bordeaux university, under the watchful eye of Emile Peynaud. After arriving back home, Serge, took charge of wine production at Musar in 1959, determined to make fine, long lived wine.

The Bekaa Valley: This is more of a plateau than a valley, sheltered between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains. Nights are cool and grapes rarely ripen before the middle of September, which is quite late in Mediterranean climates. This lateness allows a build-up of complex flavours, and ripening of tannins whilst maintaining balanced acidity. Vineyards are planted on well drained gravelly soils over limestone, which function as underground reservoirs retaining water, useful when rainfall may be negligible. So few interventions in the vineyard allow for Organic certification in the winery, which is situated on the outskirts of Beirut.

Grapes and Vines: Vineyards were planted from the 1930s onwards and low yields of grapes, from such mature bush vines, provide concentrated fruits. 3 black varieties are planted: Cabernet Sauvignon, Carignan and Cinsault. As in many red wines produced in Bordeaux in France, Cabernet Sauvignon is an important part of the blend of grapes used to produce a wine that is capable of ageing, having high tannins, high acidity, and complex fruit, able to withstand maturation in oak barrels. The Cinsault vine is capable of withstanding drought and its fruit, from such old vines, adds vivid, red fruit fragrance and flavour with refreshing acidity. Carignan, which needs time to ripen, is ideally suited to the climate in the Bekaa Valley adding colour, tannins, and acidity to the final wine. Weather patterns each year will determine the proportion of each grape variety used.

Wine Making and Maturation: It takes 7 years to produce a vintage of Château Musar. Once harvested, the 3 grape varieties undergo separate, cool, long fermentation processes lasting up to 6 months. The young, unfinished wines are then transferred to French Nevers Oak barrels, where they age for 1 year. Flavours of vanilla, creamy oak and spice are taken up by the wines whilst tannins start to soften and oxidative flavours such as coffee, toffee, tobacco, and cedar start to develop as tiny amounts of air pass from the cellars, through the oak and into the wine. Assemblage, in this case - blending, of the final wine occurs when the cellar - master decides on the mix of young wines going into that which will best showcase the vintage. Once assembled it is then set aside to rest another year so that the wines slowly integrate to form a harmonious whole with a complexity of flavours developing. Bottled, the wine is cellared where it will mature

for another 4 years before it is released for sale. As Jancis Robinson has remarked, such wine has many similarities to fine, mature red Bordeaux but very often it appears fresher and more youthful than such wines of similar age.

Food and Wine: Heart-warming rich foods from lamb tagine, cassoulet, and roast vegetable stews are all ideally served with Château Musar, whilst a cheese board allows contemplation of a glass or two. Musars' wines are organic and suitable for vegetarians and vegans as they are unfined by animal based fining agents. They are also unfiltered and should either stand upright for 12 hours before serving or should be decanted to remove any sediment (preferably both). We will decant your wine at the table as mature wines are fragile.

Vintages available:

2015/£55 Frost in April, followed by a late summer heatwave, reduced the Cabernet Sauvignon yield by 65%. Red fruits, floral tones, and spice reflect the Cinsault and Carignan "nature," but the finish of leather, smoke and cedar is pure Cabernet Sauvignon.

2014 Magnums/£135: Large bottles take longer to mature, so this must be good! A wine to drink or keep. Deep red with sweet ripe dark cherry fruit, spice and warming French oak.

2013/£65: A wet, chilly winter was followed by a cool growing season with intense heat only in August; this gave an elegant wine. Red fruits, raspberry, cranberry, and rosehip dominate with a touch of spice. Exuberant now; this will mature further.

2011/£65: A wine showing more Cabernet Sauvignon characteristic (blackcurrants, cedar, and tobacco), concentrated and dense.

2008/£90: Heady and beguiling with sweetness of ripe fruits and hints of game, well-structured and still youthful.

2005/£95: Plentiful winter snow and rain were succeeded by a humid and mild summer giving a well-balanced wine with aromas of black fruits, spice, toast, smoke, chocolate, and tobacco.

2003/£90: From April onwards there was a heatwave reducing the harvest by 30%. Big and vigorous this is high in alcohol with sweetness of ripe fruits, spice and milk chocolate notes.

2002/£90: A long, rainy, and chilly winter lasted until June, followed by a mild July and hot August. Grapes took longer to ripen than usual and the wine making team had to be very selective in their choice of fruit. The resulting wines are bigger, riper, and fuller than expected; it was an exceptional year. Red and black fruit characteristics combine with Christmas cake aromas, spice, figs, and dates.

1997/£90: Sweet ripe fruits, a savoury edge and mellow softness; truly a mature wine.

Other vintages:

1985/£300; 1981/£250; 1979/£200



The Consolation of Maturity – with a nod to Boethius

Northern Rhône: Accountable for only 5% of the wine produced in the Rhône Valley. Although Vineyards such as Côte Rôtie and Hermitage, where the Syrah grape thrives & is known for its depth of character have attracted cult-like devotion.

2010, 2011 & 2012 Crozes Hermitage, Alain Graillet: Crozes Hermitage produces more than half of the northern region's wine, most which is red, made from the Syrah grape. It surrounds its more famous neighbour, Hermitage, and traditionally was seen as a producer of less expensive wines, designed for more immediate drinking. Land prices in Crozes Hermitage are less than in Hermitage and have attracted many young, innovative wine makers over the last few decades, intent on making a name for themselves. Alain Graillet is one such producer, who arrived in the region in 1985; son Maxime now runs the domaine. The vineyards lie at the heart of what is called "Le Châssis", alluvial terraces that lie to the south and south-east of Hermitage comprising of medium sized "galets roulés" (round pebbles) and red clay over deep gravel laid down by various ice ages, as compared to granite slopes north of Hermitage. The resulting wine is a full bodied red, generous, and fruity with fresh acidity and length of flavour... so pigs can fly after all?!

Per bottle £55

1985 Hermitage "La Chapelle" Paul Jaboulet Aîné: The vineyards of Hermitage grow above the town of Tain l'Hermitage, high on the east bank of the river Rhône, warmed by the afternoon sunshine and protected from the wind. Paul Jaboulet Aîné is one of the oldest négociant houses in the Northern Rhône owning its own vineyards as well as producing wines from grapes grown and purchased from small producers. The family firm was sold after the death of Gérard Jaboulet in 1997 and this is a rare opportunity to sip and appreciate a mature example of one of their most famous wines "La Chapelle", produced from the grapes of the family's finest vineyard sites or "lieux dit. Medium bodied, with superb balance grip and length this has layer upon layer of complex mature aromas and flavours ranging from red berried fruits, leather, smoked meats, cedar, pepper, liquorice, cigar box and smoke. A wine of finesse to contemplate whilst it unfolds in a glass after decanting. **Per bottle £250**



Southern Rhône: As the river Rhône wends its way to the sea steep valley sides give way to a vast wine producing region, south of Montélimar. The Mediterranean climate with hot summers and mild, short winters is suited to a mix of grape varieties, including Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre and Syrah, which thrive. Well known appellations include Côte du Rhône, Châteauneuf du Pape, Gigondas, Lirac and Vacqueyras.

2005 Château de Beaucastel, Famille Perrin, Châteauneuf-du Pape Renowned for its consistency of style and quality Château de Beaucastel lies within the huge appellation of Châteauneuf-du Pape, north of Avignon. The Perrin family have owned this estate for more than a century and since the 1960s organic farming methods have been followed whilst biodynamic principles were also taken up in 1974, which have allowed old vine roots to penetrate very deep into the soils, combatting the threat of drought. All 13 authorised grape varieties are grown on the 70ha plot where large round pebbles feature on the surface with sand, clay, and limestone below. The 13 grape varieties, Grenache: 30%, Mourvèdre: 30%, Vaccarèse, Terret Noir, Muscardin, Clairette, Picpoul, Picarden, Bourboulenc, Rousanne: 15%, Counoise: 10%, Syrah: 10% and Cinsault: 5%, are handpicked and vinified separately and then aged for 1 year in oak. 2005 was an excellent vintage producing a full-bodied wine of great complexity, beautifully balanced, packed with aromas and flavours of black fruits, hints of liquorice and spice, coffee and falling autumn leaves. A wine to appreciate with rich dishes, or to quietly sip and savour! **Per bottle £85**



2009 Vieux Télégraphe, Vignobles Brunier, Domaine de Vieux Télégraphe, Châteauneuf-du-Pape Daniel Brunier, the owner of Domaine Vieux Télégraphe, is very happy with quality of this red, produced in a year when the winter was cold, followed by a "cleansing" Mistral, and then gentle rain. August was hot, allowing for an early harvest of fruit from the family vineyards based on "La Crau" a stony plateau in Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Wine production at this estate is as natural as possible with minimum interventions, both in the vineyard and in the winery, and the resulting wines express the local terroir, the surrounding "garrigue" where thyme, rosemary and lavender thrive. In this wine, Grenache is the dominant grape where old vines give low yields of concentrated and complex red fruit with touches of white pepper. Syrah and Mourvèdre form 30% of the blend adding ripe tannins, acidity, black fruits, and spice. It is full bodied, robust, and textured with a pleasing "sweetness" of fresh red berries: raspberries, plums, and cherries. Touches of liquorice, herbs, bay, and spice all add to a complex ball of flavours. Enjoy with robust dishes, roast Mediterranean vegetables, and lamb tagine. **Per bottle £95**

2005 Château Cantenac Brown, Margaux, Grand Cru Classé, Bordeaux. Cantenac Brown is named after the original English owner, John Lewis Brown, who, in the nineteenth century, built the château and established a vineyard, which was classified as a Grand Cru Classé in 1855. The vineyards, mainly Cabernet Sauvignon with some Merlot and Cabernet Franc, are situated in Cantenac, a commune, which has been merged with the more famous Margaux. 2005 was a very good vintage in Bordeaux, warm enough to ripen Cabernet Sauvignon on well drained soils, which, with its high tannins and acidity produces wines capable of improving over the years. This traditional claret is now fully mature and mellow with dark fruits, cedar, tobacco, violets, a dry earthiness, and freshness of acidity; an ideal wine to celebrate festive feasts with friends and family.

Per bottle £95.00



The Consolation of Maturity – With a nod to Boethius

Ridge Vineyards, California, USA. Ridge Vineyards, champion of excellent quality, single vineyard wines, seeks out the finest vineyards, matching grape varieties to climate and soils. It then practises what it calls “pre-industrial” wine making, respecting nature, with minimum intervention both in its vineyards and wineries. Monte Bello, Ridge's most famous wine, was first made in 1962 from Cabernet Sauvignon and in 1964 the first Zinfandel was produced, a grape variety which, until then was usually associated with inexpensive wines, such as “Blush Zinfandel”.

2010 Geyserville, Ridge Vineyards, Alexander Valley

Geyserville, a vineyard plot 1¼ miles long by ½ a mile wide, lies at the western edge of the Alexander Valley and is home to the oldest vineyards that Ridge farm; the “Old Patch” of vineyard contains vines more than 130 years old, which contribute to the intensity and complexity of the final wine. Although Zinfandel is the major grape variety used, 64% in the 2010 vintage, Carignane, Petite Sirah and Mataro (Mourvèdre) are also part of the field-blend used. The site benefits from warm days, ideal for ripening fruit, and cooling evening breezes with occasional morning mists that allow the vines to rest. The soil is a deep, gravelly loam, which is mixed with large river rocks that provide excellent drainage whilst allowing the soil to retain heat. When picked the grapes undergo fermentation processes that uses natural vineyard yeasts, no cultures are added. Maturation takes place in American Oak barrels of various ages, softening and rounding the wine, adding flavours of spice and vanilla without overpowering it. 2010, as with Lytton Springs, was a cool year, until August when intense heat sunburnt grapes over a couple of days. Those grapes that survived and recovered produced a medium to full bodied red with aromas and flavours of cherry and plum, hints of cloves, gravel, and earth. Rich and elegant with long, complex flavours this wine is approaching maturity.

Per bottle £75

2018 Petite Sirah, Lytton Estate, Ridge Vineyards, Dry Creek Valley

Another stunning wine from Ridge, made from a grape variety that used to be blended in with Zinfandel: Petite Sirah, otherwise known as Durif. Vines are farmed sustainably on clay rich soils to produce fruit high in colour, tannins, and aromatics. Hand harvested, grapes are fermented whole, rather than being pressed, to manage tannins and to enhance the fruit, with minimum interventions. Matured then for 15 months in American oak barrels this produces a full-bodied wine, with ripe tannins, to appreciate now but capable of further development. With great complexity on the nose and palate, of cassis, leather, liquorice and a hint of lavender and rose backed up with mint, black olives and a mineral edge. A fine wine for rich, hearty dishes or to savour, swirling in a large glass, by the fire, to appreciate the sheer complexity and charm produced by one of the most renowned Californian producers. **Per bottle £85.00**



2010 Lytton Springs, Ridge Vineyards, Dry Creek Valley

Ridge first made wine at Lytton Springs in 1972 but it only purchased the property in 1990, which is named after the original 19th century owner, Captain William Lytton. The site is larger than at Geyserville and is situated just north of Healdsburg on the benchland and rolling hills separating Dry Creek from Alexander Valley. It is ideal for the production of high-quality Zinfandel with cool foggy mornings giving way to warm sunny afternoons and breezy late evenings. Gravelly clay dominates the varied soils, which aids water retention and allows the slow ripening of grapes. The Zinfandel vines, 100 years old or more, are interplanted with Petite Sirah, Carignane, Mataro and Grenache. As at Geyserville, fermentation and any processes, such as fining, are conducted as naturally as possible with minimum intervention. In 2010 the wines were aged in barrel for 14 months and then just 32 parcels of wine, out of an original 46, were assembled into the final blend. This is an opulent wine, well-structured with a complex web of aromas and flavours: blackberries, dark cherry fruit, plums, and cocoa. **Per bottle £75**



2019 Chardonnay, Ridge Estate, Santa Cruz Mountains

In the 1970s Ridge planted Chardonnay vines at altitude in the Santa Cruz Mountains, below the Montebello vineyard. Such vines are now producing low yields of high, quality fruit and as conditions are cool ripening is extended, preserving acidity, and creating complexity and concentration of flavours with a minerality reflecting the decomposing limestone subsoil, which is overlaid with Franciscan green stone and clay. In 2019 a winter of replenishing rain was followed by a cold spring; the summer that followed was warm with even temperatures, cool mists and fogs reigning in the heat, giving an excellent harvest of Chardonnay. Hand-picked parcels of grapes were fermented separately in small, oak barrels and then assembled into the final wine before being returned to barrel for a further 14 months of maturation. Now creamy and rich with aromas of lemon zest and citrus fruit, pineapple, blossom, and wet stones backed up with a refreshing acidity, this is a wine to partner dishes such as fillet of pork, scallops, and halibut with a buttery sauce or to sit and contemplate alone! **Per bottle £90.00**



Burgundies to inspire

WHITES (CHARDONNAY)

2016 Bourgogne Chardonnay, Philippe Colin. £45.00

Since inheriting half of his family vineyards, which are based around Chassagne, Philippe Colin has been busily implementing the "lutte raisonnée" regime where the dosing and timing of treatments for the vines are planned and based according to long term local weather forecasting for the village. The use of chemical weedkillers has been abandoned and grass deliberately grown between rows of vines to reduce humidity and rot. The vines themselves are assiduously pruned, whilst vegetation and grape bunches are limited. Grapes, harvested in the autumn, undergo a traditional fermentation, using indigenous yeasts, which starts in tank and finishes in barrels where the new wine rests until the summer. Philippe' wines are known for their elegance and subtlety rather than their weight and power and this Chardonnay, with its modest appellation is a fine example.

2016 St. Aubin 1er Cru, "Sur Gamay," Bernard Moreau et Fils. £85.00

Most of Bernard Moreau's small family vineyards, sustainably farmed, lie in Chassagne, but others lie in the more modest appellation of St. Aubin, which in recent years has been producing some exceptional wines. This is from the one of hamlet's 1er Cru vineyards, "Sur Gamay", which is situated on a hillside overlooking the hamlet of Gamay, east of St. Aubin, on clay and limestone soils. Facing south-west it basks in warm afternoon sunshine, which ripens the Chardonnay grapes to a greater extent than those produced in vineyards facing south-east. When ripe, grapes are hand harvested from old vines, giving low yields of fruit with complex flavours. This is packed with aromas and flavours of orchard fruits, baked apple pie, buttered toast and roasted nuts and finishes with a touch of citrus; it is highly recommended.

2016 Chassagne Montrachet, Les Vergers 1er Cru, Domaine Philippe Colin, £110.00.

Chassagne sits next door to the more famous village of Puligny in the Côte du Beaune. The domaine has only been in existence since 2003 when Philippe Colin' father divided his estate between his sons; Philippe is a rising star. This is from Les Vergers, a premier cru vineyard, which yields wines with power but with some delicacy and finesse.

2014 Meursault, Clos de la Barre, Domaine des Comtes Lafon, £110.00.

Dominique Lafon manages the vineyards and cellars of this famous domaine, which produces some of the finest Chardonnay in the village of Meursault, in the Côte de Beaune. His village wines include those made specifically from the Clos de la Barre, a small walled vineyard. The estate follows biodynamic principles, and the wine of Clos de la Barre is fermented and aged in barrels previously used for Premier/Grand Cru wines so that the final wine is not overwhelmed by flavours of oak.

2014 Meursault, "Les Tillets", Antoine Jobard. £120.00

"Les Tillets" is a single vineyard site within the commune of Meursault, situated at altitude on a limestone escarpment. Out in the vineyard only sulphur and copper sulphate are used to combat fungal diseases and the use of weedkillers, herbicides and other artificial pesticides is eschewed. Once harvested, Chardonnay grapes are allowed to ferment naturally in oak barrels, the young wine then resting on its lees until it has matured for a year. Once racked it is aged for a further 6-9 months, developing complex flavours and texture. Only 12-15% of the oak barrels used are new as Antoine prefers to express the vineyard terroir and its fruit rather than the assertive flavours of new oak - the old oak barrels that are used simply add gentle oxidative flavours and texture. The finished wine has freshness, due in part to the high altitude of the vineyard, developing fine acidity underpinning the citrus and floral notes. It is full-bodied, with expressive minerality - refined and elegant.

REDS (PINOT NOIR)

2016 Beaune 1er Cru "Les Sizies", Domaine Jean Guiton. £55.00

The vineyards of Domaine Jean Guiton total just 12 hectares, with their 1er cru in the Cote de Beaune. "Les Sizies" is from a parcel lying west of the village of Beaune on its lower slopes. In 2016 many vineyards were decimated by severe frosts. Happily, the aspect and angle of slope at "Les Sizies" left them undamaged. If you have enjoyed Guillaume Guiton's Bourgogne, then this has more body and weight with jewel bright red and black fruits, a touch of new oak, spice and savoury aromas and good structure.

2014 Fixin, La Place, Domaine Jean Tardy, £55.00

Guillaume Tardy acquired for his family domaine "La Place", a tiny plot of land within the small village of Fixin, in the north of Cotes de Nuits. A stint of making wine in Australia adds to Guillaume's traditional wine making to produce velvety rich red wines.

2014 Morey St. Denis, Dujac Fils & Pere, £75.00.

Domaine Dujac, owned by the Seysses family, is renowned for wines, capable of longevity, and produced from its own vineyards in the village of Morey St. Denis, on the Côtes de Nuits. However, this attractive village wine, made by Jeremy Seysses and his father Jacques from grapes purchased from other growers, is designed for relatively early drinking.

2016 Vosne- Romanée, Domaine du Clos Frantin, Albert Bichot, £95.00.

Small vineyards surrounding the unpretentious village of Vosne Romanée produce some of the world's most famous wines from the Côte de Nuits. This is from Albert Bichot, a larger Burgundian producer, and his flagship Domaine du Clos Frantin that consistently produces characterful wines.

2010 Chambolle Musigny, La Combe d' Orveau, Anne Gros, £105.00.

Anne Gros' reputation as a wine producer of excellence has soared since she took sole command of her father's business in 1995. At Chambolle Musigny the domaine owns La Combe d'Orveau (Vale of Gold), which produces perfumed, aromatic wines with soft ripe fruits and great finesse.

2014 Chambolle Musigny, "Les Athets", Domaine Jean Tardy, £120.00

The commune of Chambolle Musigny, in the Côte de Nuits, produces wines renowned for their aromatic purity and elegance. "Les Athets," is produced from Pinot Noir grapes grown in the vineyard of "Les Ata," which is situated at the foot of the hills on limestone rich clay soils. The vines, planted in 1929 and 1975, produce low yields of concentrated fruits from vineyards which have been tended as naturally as possible by Guillaume Tardy. Picked early to retain freshness about 65% of the grape bunches remain intact when placed in the fermentation tanks, instead of being crushed, to produce a wine with delicate, fresh aromas which are retained throughout maturation in, mainly, old oak barrels. This is juicy and concentrated with velvety tannins and aromas of ripe red fruits, "crimson jam," a touch of old-fashioned cough medicine spice and roses.

2014/2016 Volnay, Domaine des Comtes Lafon, £150.

The village of Volnay, with soils with a high chalk content and low clay content produce some of the most elegant, fragrant red wines on the Côte de Beaune. This, produced by Dominique Lafon, is made from the young vines of Volnay Santenots 1er cru planted in 1996 and 2002. Soft and plump, with red fruit and little tannin.

Sweet wines to desire

DESSERT WINES

2004 Château Coutet, 1er Cru Classé, Sauternes - Barsac AC. 14% abv. £55 per bottle

Château Coutet is the largest single vineyard site in the commune of Barsac, with thin soils of silt and sand with some red clay over a bedrock of limestone. Such soils provide delicacy, freshness and minerality in the wines, which since the 1990s have gained a reputation for a consistent high quality. Coutet, within the appellation of Barsac, is separated from the much larger Sauternes by the cool waters of the tiny Ciron river, which flows into the warmer Garonne. It is this convergence, as at other properties in the locality, which aids in the formation of early morning mists in the autumn, ideal for the development of noble rot (*botrytis cinerea*) which causes ripe Sémillon grapes to shrivel and dehydrate, concentrating sugars, glycerine, flavours and acidity. At Château Coutet Sémillon accounts for 75% of the planted vines with 23% Sauvignon Blanc and 2% Muscadelle. Grapes, affected by noble rot, are handpicked, very gently pressed and then slowly fermented. Fermentation, with such high levels of sugars is very slow and yeasts die leaving young "liquoreux", very high in sugars. These young wines are then matured in new oak barrels for 18 months to become as this 2004 vintage: a complete, harmonious wine with orange, marmalade and citrus fruit aromas with a touch of marzipan and vanilla. Sweetness beautifully balanced with fresh acidity. Delicious with lemon and frangipane tarts.



2005 Château Filhot, Grand Cru Classé, Sauternes, Bordeaux. Half Bottle £28.00

A perfect match with fruit desserts (our Danish apple and almond cake and apple crumble), blue cheeses, and, as in France, with terrine or pâté. This is a fine example of a mature wine from a vineyard that lies just south of the village of Sauternes, facing south-west, where ripe Sémillon grapes, affected by noble rot in the damp misty mornings of late summer, are dried out in the warmth and dry of the afternoon sunshine. Grapes are harvested over time, according to the evolution of the noble rot, and when all are gathered in a slow, cool, fermentation proceeds, ceasing when sugar levels are still high, to produce a rich, sweet wine with balancing acidity from Sauvignon grapes. Evolving over time in oak barrels and bottle this is well structured, with a complex mesh of flavours: of candied fruits, quince, plum skins, almonds and ginger spice and a pleasing savoury oiliness. (This wine has a natural deposit of tartrate crystals and so you may choose to have the wine decanted).



2007 Erdener Prälat, Riesling Auslese, Ernst Loosen, Mosel, Germany. 7% abv. £48 per bottle.

"Ernie" Loosen is one of the very finest German wine makers, making sublime Riesling. This wine is from his share in the tiny 4-acre vineyard of Prälat, which is found high above the river Mosel, on steep south facing slopes near the village of Erden. Grapes picked late in the season with Auslese levels of sugar and some botrytis have made this luscious, sweet wine, low in alcohol, which has matured to give a web of flavours of honey, nuts, tropical and stone fruits all backed up with refreshing acidity; a contemplation wine to enjoy with cheese, fruit desserts or even pork terrines/foie gras.

1996 Clos de Bourg, Vouvray Moelleux, Huet, Loire Valley, France. 12% abv. £50 per bottle.

Vouvray, situated in Touraine along the Loire Valley, produces wines made from the Chenin Blanc grape, which at its best is capable of producing wine that will mature for 50 years or so. This is from the Clos de Bourg vineyard, which has existed since the 8th century, and Gaston Huet and his family, following biodynamic principles, are recognized as some of the finest producers. Moelleux indicates that the wine is sweet but not so unctuous as Sauternes; think of layers of elegant flavours of baked, ripe apples, honey and toffee notes with a hint of spice backed with citrus fruit acidity. Savour with cheeses, apple tart or pork rillettes.

Rutherglen Muscat, Stanton & Killeen, Rutherglen, Victoria, Australia. 17.5% abv.

£30 per bottle, £5 per 75ml.

This traditional Muscat is made by Wendy and Natasha Killeen in the hot climate of Rutherglen where Muscat grapes are late harvested so as to be fully ripe. Fermentation is then interrupted early on when fortification with grape spirit takes place. Over the next 3 to 4 years the resulting sweet wine undergoes ageing and blending in old oak barrels. Still young, for a liqueur Muscat, it retains floral aromas whilst aged sufficiently in the heat to be amber in colour with flavours of dried fruits, sultanas, raisins and toffee. A luscious wine with freshness to serve with the richest of pudding or cakes.

Maury "Solera 1928" Grenache, Vignerons de Maury, Roussillon, France. 17% abv. £30 per bottle.

A solera system is a process whereby wines of different ages are blended and aged over a period of time in old oak barrels; the youngest wines take on the characteristics of the oldest. This system is used in the village of Maury whereby local wine makers produce a sweet red wine from the Grenache grape; it is fortified part way through fermentation. The wine is then aged in a solera system, established in 1928, and overtime takes on nutty, dried fig aromas, a bit like a fine old Madeira with toffee sweetness. Very agreeable with dark chocolate and Christmas cake.

PORT

Kopke Ten Year Old Tawny Port, Oporto, Portugal. 20% abv. £7.50 per 75ml.

One of Portugal's oldest Port houses, founded in 1638 by Nikolau Kopke, Consul General of the Hanseatic League. The Kopke family went on to acquire land in the Douro in 1781, with wine production soon becoming its chief business. Carlos Alves, is the Kopke's family winemaker at the São Luiz estate, on the steep slopes of Tabuaço, in Adorigo; where some parcels on the steepest slopes are still harvested by hand. The Tawny is a blend of varying ages of Port averaging 10 years. With vibrant notes of kirsch, leading through to marzipan, orange zest, baking spices, and rich dark chocolate. The younger years give a lean acidity that harmonizes well with this wines residual sweetness and tannin. Pairs well with dark chocolate ganache, or something more in line with Duke Nikolau, Stollen.

Quinta do Crasto, Late Bottled Vintage Port, 2016, Douro, Portugal. 20% abv. £6.75 per 75ml.

Quinta do Crasto, a small family run estate high up in the Douro Valley in Portugal, produces this Late Bottled Vintage Port (LBV), a port that has been produced and aged in vast old vats over 4 years; once bottled it may still mature and need decanting but essentially it is a port designed for immediate drinking. Still ruby in colour, it is robust, round and rich with aromas of red and black fruits, liquorice and spice. A fortified wine to invigorate on the walk home!



2003 Quinta do Crasto Vintage Port, Douro, Portugal. 20% abv. £60 per bottle.

2003 was hot and dry in the Douro, a stunning year in which to make vintage port; this is the finest port produced at Quinta Crasto. It is designed to mature over time and must be decanted to remove any sediment. Drinking now it is a wine to savour and contemplate over a plate of cheese or some very dark chocolate. Concentrated and dark, complex and sweet with flavours of ripe damsons and sloes, baked dried fruits and spice. Magnificent.

SHERRY

Barbadillo Pedro Ximénez (PX) Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Spain. 19%abv. £4.75 for 75ml.

Barbadillo is family run concern that has been producing sherry in Sanlúcar de Barrameda on the Spanish Atlantic coast since 1821. This PX is a luscious wine produced from sun dried Pedro Ximénez grapes. It is aged for 5 years, gently oxidising in old casks to become brown and sticky with aromas of chocolate, toffee and Muscat raisins, balanced with fresh acidity. It is delicious poured over ice cream or served with sticky chocolate puddings.

Matusalem, Oloroso Viejo, Gonzalez Byass, Jerez, Spain. 20.5% abv. £32.50 per half bottle.

One of the finest, rare sherries produced in the bodegas of Gonzalez Byass. This Oloroso, made from Palomino grapes, develops in old barrels in a solera system over 15 years; the barrels are only partly filled to allow oxidation. Pedro Ximénez grapes produce a luscious, sweet sherry which is blended with the Oloroso, which after another 15 years of ageing produces a rare, wonderfully concentrated and complex wine with a rich sweet finish. Mahogany in colour, with cinnamon, dried fruit, candied orange peel, coffee and chocolate hints. This has a velvety texture and is a joy to sip. Heaven in a glass.



