

THE TIMES

03.12.05

**GIFTS SPECIAL**

**WHY RUBY WAX  
HAS TURNED  
BAG LADY**

**THE IMAN COMETH  
JONATHAN IVE  
TECHNO KING**

**PLUS  
HUNDREDS  
OF FIENDISH  
PRESENT  
IDEAS**

# MAGAZINE

**PLUS JANE MACQUITTY'S 25 BEST WINES UNDER £8 ★ PERFECT PARTY FROCKS**

# TOP 100 FESTIVE WINES



Order in some Christmas cheer, with Jane MacQuitty's selection of the very best mid-price bottles

WEEK TWO: 25 BOTTLES UNDER £8

## WHITE

**2004 Sancerre Clos des Bouffants, Roger Neveu, France, MAJESTIC, £9.49, or buy two for £7.99 each until December 15.** Sancerre, like chablis, is one of those big-name festive whites that everyone wants to splash out on at Christmas. Although not so stridently green as New World sauvignons, the best sancerres, such as this restrained, floral, grapey '04, with a touch of grapefruit zest on the finish, still have sufficient acidity and guts to cut through rich seafood and oily smoked fish, especially Christmas Day's smoked salmon.

**2004 Chablis Domaine Servin, France, MAJESTIC, £8.49, or buy two for £7.99 each until December 15.** Despite the many dilute chablis produced in 2004, the vintage still offers some surprisingly good wines, and this is one of them. Chablis' distinctive limestone and clay soil accounts for much of its wines' dry, tart, steely style, with that delectable cheesy bouquet and finish that chablis fans adore. Domaine Servin's 2004 delivers lots of complex, floral fruit and the sort of lively, lemony, verdant taste that begs to be squirted over a plate of fresh seafood.

**2004 Mâcon Igé, La Crepillonne Chardonnay, Domaine Fichet, France, STONE VINE & SUN (01962 712351), £6.95.** Tuck into this elegant, floral, grapey, young chardonnay from the Mâconnais, and revel in its rich violet-scented fruit. The Fichet brothers believe that the southwest-facing slopes, catching the last bit of warmth from the sun, coupled with their limestone-rich soil and squeaky-clean stainless-steel-fermenting and ageing-on-lees techniques account for much of their winning Mâconnais streak. Who could disagree?

**2004 Ermita Veracruz Verdejo, Rueda, Bodegas Aldial, Spain, MAJESTIC, £6.99; SAINSBURY'S ONLINE (0800 9174092), £7.59.** Bored stiff with the usual festive whirl of rich whites accompanied by even richer dishes? Then give your palate a jump-start with this eye-catching, tastebud-grabbing Rueda white made from the verdejo grape. With so much powerful, zesty, verdant fruit on board, I loved its fine, fat, floral, gooseberry and lime zest-charged taste. One to serve either as an arresting aperitif, or with the cold Boxing Day spread.



**2004 Martius Blanc, Montsant, Agricola Falset Marca, Spain, BIBENDUM (020-7449 4120), £6.49; GRAPELAND (01727 898290), £6.99.** I taste so many wines every year, that when an unannounced bottle arrives, it has to be very, very good to win through. Yet this unusual white grenache from Falset Marca, the horseshoe-shaped hoop of land semi-circling one of Spain's leading red wine regions, Priorat, delivers intriguing refined floral, lemony spice and some fine oaky finesse, stemming from the portion of this wine that is fermented and aged in oak.

**2004 Grüner Veltliner, Meinklang, Burgenland, Austria, VINTAGE ROOTS (0118 9761999), £5.95; STONE VINE & SUN, £6.95.** No doubt about it, organic wines are getting better, and Austria's unusual white pepper-packed grüner veltliner has a place in the festive wine bin as it makes a welcome change from the usual round of sauvignon and chardonnay. Certainly, this quirky example oozes arresting, concentrated, elegant, lemon zest, white-peach and pepper flavours that make a fine aperitif and fish wine.

**2002 Erdener Treppchen Riesling Kabinett, Weingut Stephan Ehlen, Mosel, Germany, WAITROSE, £7.99.** Like the Germans and the French, my tastebuds and I have no trouble downing an off-dry aperitif like this delicious late-picked Kabinett, or drinking it, chilled, with lightly spiced Thai and Indian dishes. So go on, purists, cast aside the erroneous notion that if a wine is sweet it must be nasty, and tuck into this classic single-estate Mosel, just 9 per cent alcohol and all lingering, waxy, seductive almond and petrol-scented fruit.

**2004 Pinot Grigio, Classic Selection, Colterenzio, Vigneti delle Dolomiti, Italy, SAINSBURY'S, down £1.50 to £5.99 until Tuesday.** So many tasty pinot grigios out there this winter that it's hard to pick one, but Sainsbury's cut-price deal was just too good to miss. PG's big plus-point is its lively, leafy, lemony, understated, any time, any place style, yet with the nutty depth and body needed if you want to serve it with food. So if you like the sound of this one, then you had better move sharpish before the price goes back up on Tuesday.

**2003 Gavi, La Chiara, Italy, ODBBINS, £7.99.** Italian whites are useful festive bottles with the high levels of acidity and direct but not dominating flavours that big, spiced, festive food requires. The cortese grape from Piedmont in northwest Italy has less to say for itself than pinot grigio, but top-notch examples such as this one, grown on a mix of clay and volcanic soil and weighing in at 12 per cent alcohol, deliver aromatic, nutty, floral fruit with refined grapey, apricotty class that make it a real winter winner.

**2003 Leasingham Magnus Riesling, Clare Valley, Australia, SOMERFIELD, £7.49; 2004, SAINSBURY'S, £7.49.** The Clare Valley in South Australia is one of the prime spots in the country for the riesling grape, with a recent run of great vintages. I am happy to recommend the 2003, with its intense, waxy, peach and petrol finesse, but the warm 2004 vintage, with its fat, spicy, lychee and petrol charge, is the better wine. Either of these 13 per cent alcohol rieslings, made from 20-year-old vines, would be a whizz with a spicy, fishy starter.

**2004 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand, ASDA, £5.58.** Most wine drinkers will walk straight past this drearily labelled Kiwi sauvignon on Asda's shelf, and that would be a great pity. While 2004 was not the best Marlborough sauvignon blanc vintage, this strong, grassy, peapod and green bean-stashed edition, topped up with 9 per cent of the semillon grape, is a thoroughly classy glassful, delivering almost sancerresque style at a budget price.

## SWEET WHITE

**2005 Brilliant Disguise Moscato Bianco, Two Hands, Barossa Valley, Australia, 50cl, ODBBINS, £7.99; NOËL YOUNG, £8.99.** Two Hands were keen to make a lighter pudding wine from locally grown 80 to 100-year-old muscat grapes, and decided to follow the Italians' lead by stopping the fermentation in stainless-steel tanks, leaving lots of residual grape sugar, and bottling the wine under pressure to retain some fizz, complete with just 6.5 per cent alcohol. The result is a delicious soft, sweet, grapey, fizzy dessert wine — ideal with sweet festive fare. >>