

The Guardian

The 50 best wines for Christmas 2019

The Observer
Christmas food
and drink 2019

High street bargains, best value buys – and reds, whites and fizz to splash out on, chosen for Observer Food Monthly



David Williams

Sun 17 Nov 2019
12.30 GMT



Whites under £10

Voyage au Sud Vermentino

Pays d'Oc, France 2018 (£5.99, [Waitrose](#))

A white grape variety that thrives in the Mediterranean sun, vermentino retains its freshness in the heat. Here that makes for a brilliant value, crowd-pleasing party wine with perky lemon-and-lime and a gently peachy character.

Star buy:

Tesco Finest Dessert Sémillon

Riverina, Australia 2015 (£6, 37.5cl, [Tesco](#))

Year in, year out family firm De Bortoli turn out some of the best-value stickies around, with the golden wine they produce for Tesco an Aussie Sauternes-alike of tangy marmalade, tropical fruit and honey that is a perfect fit for blue cheese.

Is This It? Pinot Blanc

Pannon, Hungary 2018 (£6.50, [The Co-op](#))

Hard not to have New York noughties popsters the Strokes' doleful hit Is This It in mind as you sip this dry white Hungarian, although it's a much happier experience: with its almonds, subtle creaminess and ripe pear fruit, it's an elegant, unpretentious bargain.

Taste the Difference Austrian Traisental Grüner Veltliner

Traisental, Austria 2018 (£8.25, [Sainsbury's](#))

Austria's trademark grape variety grüner veltliner is rippling with fresh stone fruit sprinkled with spice and scented with flowers in this fleshy dry white from the prolific Markus Huber. Plenty of food-matching versatility.

Zarper Sauvignon, Casablanca

Chile 2019 (£8.25, [Morrisons](#))

Made by the reliable own-label specialists Viña Indómita in Chile's original cool-climate valley, Casablanca, this super-lively sauvignon blanc has all the irrepressible citrus, blackcurrant leaf and elderflower you could ask for from the variety.

Leitz Riesling

Rheingau, Germany 2018 (£8.99, Aldi stores)

A rare Aldi wine with a producer's name on the label, and it's a name worth showing off about. Johannes Leitz's reislings are never less than diverting, with, in this case, a tongue-tingling, fish course-matching lime-citrus raciness.

Waitrose & Partners Petit Manseng

Jurançon, France (£9.99, [Waitrose](#))

In the foothills of the Pyrenees, Jurançon is the home of some of France's best-value white wines, both sweet and, in this case, dry, from the petit manseng grape, with its cleansing grapefruity tanginess and juicy exotic fruit.

Krasno Sauvignon Blanc-Ribolla

Slovenia 2018 (£9.99, or £7.49 as part of a mix 6, [majestic.co.uk](#))

Pristine, clean-cut fruit and a stream of fresh acidity are the hallmarks of so many of the white wines made in the former Yugoslavia's most northerly state, and this is no exception: delightfully fresh red apple, lemon and herby-grassiness.

Whites £10-£20



Hill-Smith Estate Chardonnay

Eden Valley, Australia 2018 (£11.99, [Waitrose](#))

Lovely clean-cut modern chardonnay from one of the traditional big names of Australian wine, a white burgundy alternative for the big Christmas Day event with just a touch of savoury toastiness from oak alongside the yellow plum fruit.

Escarpment Pinot Gris

Martinborough, New Zealand 2017 (£13.80, tanners-wines.co.uk)

Escarpment have a justified reputation for pinot noir, but the estate has a way with the white variety pinot gris, too, making in this case a shimmering dry wine filled with quince and pear, subtle toasty notes, and a dusting of baking spice.

Rustenberg Straw Wine

Coastal Region, South Africa 2017/2018 (2017 £13.99, 37.5cl, Waitrose; 2018 £9.99 in a mixed six majestic.co.uk)

A South African version of what the French would call a vin de paille, this gorgeous dessert wine is made from grapes dried on straw mats in the Cape sun, tasting like sweet ripe apricots stored in a luscious syrup of orange blossom honey.

Domaine Gilbert Picq Chablis

Burgundy, France 2017 (from £15, stannarywine.com; winebuyers.com)

Few wines are better at putting a special occasion meal on the right footing than classic chablis, with its glistening, tensile steely acidity, salty minerals, and pithy lemon citrus the Picq domaine's example gets the juices flowing from the first sip.

Bodegas Nestares Eguizábal A Veredas

Rioja, Spain 2016 (£15.95, stonevine.co.uk)

An unusual (and not just in Rioja) oak-aged blend of sauvignon blanc and chardonnay that works beautifully with its beguiling mix of ripe apples and peaches with flinty smokiness in a white that's intense, long, and balanced.

Star buy:

G de Château Guiraud

Bordeaux, France 2015 (£16, thewinesociety.com)

From an estate best known for its Sauternes sweet wines, this is a captivating oak-aged dry white made from the same blend of sauvignon blanc and sémillon, and offering peachy succulence, a hint of smoke and luminous acidity. A delight.

Domaine de Saint Cosme Les Deux Albion

IGP Vaucluse Principauté D'Orange Blanc, France 2017 (from £16.50, divinefinewines.co.uk; gauntleys.com)

From a producer justly celebrated for its Gigondas reds, an utterly charming, rich and rounded dry white, that marries full-bodied apricot and peach fleshiness and nougat notes with honeysuckle perfumes and a trickle of citrus freshness.

Susana Balbo Signature White Blend

Uco Valley, Argentina 2017 (£17.99, henningswineco.uk)

This super-smart Argentinian take on the Bordeaux white blend from top producer Susana Balbo mixes in a little of the aromatic torrontés grape variety bringing flavours of tangy grapefruit, guava and minerals, and superb length and depth.

Whites £20 +



Niepoort Redoma Branco

Douro, Portugal 2018 (from £21, tanners-wines.co.uk; buonvino.co.uk)

Dirk Niepoort is justly famous for making some of Portugal's finest ports and red wines, but his whites can be equally arresting, this oak-aged blend of local Douro grape varieties is a compelling mix of almonds, peaches and citrus tang.

Inama Vigneto du Lot Soave Classico

Italy 2016 (£27, or £24.30 as part of a mix six, majestic.co.uk)

Soave doesn't have the best reputation, but its best producers make some of Italy's finest dry whites. Inama is one such, and this single-vineyard garganega, with its glossy texture and flavours of orchard fruit, almonds and macerated herbs, is a beauty.

Star buy:

Marcel Deiss Engelgarten

Alsace, France 2016 (from £29, averys.com; leaandsandeman.co.uk)

In a region that is known for its single varietal wines, Marcel Deiss's biodynamically-grown single-vineyard engelgarten mixes up five varieties for a gloriously sensual, exotically scented, full-bodied but finely balanced dry white.

Isola e Olena Vin Santo del Chianti Classico

Tuscany, Italy 2008 (from £36.14, 37.5cl, laywheeler.com; ahadleigh-wine.com; bottleapostle.com)

Made from grapes that are dried for five months to concentrate the sugar and flavour, and then aged for eight years in barrels, this is wine as sweet elixir, an intense combination of wild flower honey, orange citrus and vanilla essence.

Red wines

Reds under £10



Porta Seis Red

Lisbon, Portugal 2018 (from £6.25, [The Co-op](#); [Majestic](#); [Sainsbury's](#))

A cult hit when it was first sold in Majestic, this juicy, jammy blend of local varieties tinta roriz, castelão and touriga nacional has lost none of its charm now it's hit the supermarkets: a sweetly enticing, brambly easy-drinking party-starter.

Salicornia Reserva

Dão, Portugal 2016 (£6.99, [Aldi](#))

Somewhat overshadowed by the big reds and ports of the neighbouring Douro Valley, the red wines of the Dão can be every bit as good, with, in this case, a satisfying mix of savoury-meatiness, floral fragrance and plum and cherry fruit.

Journey's End Kendal Lodge Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot/Cabernet Franc

Stellenbosch, South Africa 2018 (£8, [Marks & Spencer](#))

A Cape claret blend of three Bordeaux varieties, this is an excellent value option for the big day roast, with a savoury character beneath the blackcurrant fruit and red berries, some pleasingly crunchy tannins and eucalyptus-infused freshness.

Taste the Difference Bío Bío Chilean Pinot Noir

Chile 2018 (£8, [Sainsbury's](#))

The relative cool of the Bío Bío Valley in southern Chile has made it one of the country's best places for making pinot noir, and this is a very attractive example, with turkey-friendly red berries and currants and a hint of peppery spice.

Pepp Blauer Zweigelt

Weinvertel, Austria 2018 (£8.50, [thewinesociety.com](#))

Austria's zweigelt often reminds me of youthful, fruit-driven styles of Rhône syrah, and this one has that region's combination of peppery notes and freshly picked blackberries. An exuberant red to liven up the post-Boxing Day coldcuts.

Tesco Finest Saint-Chinian

France 2017/2018 (£9, [Tesco](#))

Always one of the best wines in Tesco's finest collection, both the 2018 (in stores from

December) and the 2017 vintage of this Languedoc red blend offer a keen mix of dark blackberry fruit with plenty of rosemary herb and peppery spice.

CVNE Roble

Ribera del Duero, Spain 2018 (£10, [Morrisons](#))

From one of the most consistent producers in Rioja, CVNE, this is a fine example of the tempranillo grape variety (or tinta del país is it's known locally). With minimal oak influence, it's an exuberant showcase of dark and juicy mulberry fruit succulence.

Star buy:

Famille Perrin Les Cardinaux

Côtes du Rhône Villages 2017 (£10, reduced to £7 from 11 Dec-2 Jan, [the Co-op](#))

La Famille Perrin is a rare wine company capable of scaling up their operation from boutique fine wines to high-production supermarket fare without sacrificing flavour or soul: this deep, spicy Châteauneuf-lite is a steal on the offer price.

Reds £10 to £20



Château Argadens Rouge

Bordeaux Supérieur, France 2015 (£10.95, [thewinesociety.com](#))

The 2015 vintage was excellent across France, including Bordeaux, and its charm is in full effect in a superb-value claret with classic flavours of cedar and cassis, fine tannins and moreish acidity that will work beautifully with Boxing Day beef.

Star buy:

Definition Rioja Reserva

Rioja, Spain 2013 (£13.99, or £11.99, as part of mix six, [majestic.co.uk](#))

Easily the standout in Majestic's Definition own-label range, this classically mellow, leathery, vanilla-seasoned rioja reserva, with its beguilingly suave texture, is made by one of the region's best traditional producers, La Rioja Alta.

The Party Malbec

Uco Valley, Mendoza, Argentina 2018 (£14, [Marks & Spencer](#))

From star winemaker Matias Riccitelli, this is Argentinian Malbec in a modern, slinky style, with a violet-floral scent, and a silky feel to the flow of red cherry and dark raspberry fruit, plus some wild herbiness. A smart Christmas Day contender.

Tesco Finest Mercurey

Burgundy, France 2016 (£14, [Tesco](#))

Hats off to Tesco (and supplier Bouchard Aîné et Fils) for uncovering a rare red burgundy for under £20 that delivers genuine silky pinot noir pleasure with a thin sheen of cola bean oak and classic pinot red fruit and woodland earthiness.

Domaine la Soumade Rasteau

Rhône, France 2016 (from £16.95, cambridgewine.com; tanners-wines.co.uk)

A typically deep, rich and flavourful southern Rhône blend from the village of Rasteau. There's a real taste of the warm south in the heady black and red fruits and spice, but there's freshness too in a wine that will stand up to all the Christmas feast can throw at it.

Boschis Pianezzo Dolcetto di Dogliani

Piedmont, Italy 2017

(£17.95, philglas-swiggot.com; tannico.co.uk)

Francesco Boschis takes dolcetto, generally regarded as the simplest of Piedmont's red wines, to a whole new level of lovely: unoaked, the pianezzo is explosively fruity and pure pleasure, with creamy black and red cherries.

Domaine du Vieux Pressoir Les Silices Saumur Rouge

France 2018 (£18, redsquirrelwine.com)

This is Loire cabernet franc at its purest: fragrant, silky and sappy, it's filled with summer berries and currants, unencumbered by oaky flavours (it's made in concrete rather than oak barrels), and a wonderful alternative to pricy bordeaux.

Le Volta dell'Ornellaia

Tuscany, Italy 2016 (from £19.99 Majestic, Noel Young, Hedonism Wine, Armit)

A spin-off wine from Tenuta Ornellaia, one of the original big-name Super Tuscan producers in coastal Bolgheri, this is a wonderfully deep and stylishly polished blend of Bordeaux and Tuscan varieties with a slick of delicious dark fruit.

Reds over £20



Lemelson Thea's Selection Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

Oregon, USA 2015 (£21, The Wine Society)

Oregon is now making some of the world's finest pinot noir, and this shows off the

Pacific North West's answer to Burgundy at its most elegant and seductive, all perfectly captured red and black fruit, lacy tannins and great, refreshing length.

Domaine de Fa Fleurie

Beaujolais, France 2016 (£22, yapp.co.uk)

The Grailot family are synonymous with Crozes-Hermitage in the Rhône, but Maxime and Antoine's Beaujolais operation is making some stunning wines, too, with this fleurie a lithe, lipsmacking mix of pretty red fruit and subtle earthiness.

Star buy

Nin-Ortiz Planetes

Priorat, Spain 2015 (from £38, vincognito.co.uk; bottleapostle.com)

Priorat is known for its ruggedly powerful reds based on old-vine garnacha and cariñena, but here the impressive depth of dark fruit is tempered beautifully with a swirl of sweet spice, lavender, olives and the region's famous mineral zing.

Cantina del Pino Barbaresco Albesani

Piedmont, Italy 2015 (from £43.80, laywheeler.com; stannarywine.com)

If you're looking to buy the wine-lover in your life a present for laying down for years but which is drinkable now, you'd be hard-pressed to find better value than the complex, ethereal woodland scents and snare drum-brush texture of this exquisite nebbiolo.

Sparkling wines



Taste the Difference Pignoletto DOC Spumante Brut

Emilia-Romagna, Italy NV (£9, Sainsbury's)

Very much operating in the same stylistic camp as prosecco, but coming from vineyards further south between Modena and Bologna, this is a super-clean and pretty example of pignoletto with an easy-drinking, any-time-of-day lightness and charm.

Les Caves des Hautes Côtes Crémant de Bourgogne

Burgundy, France 2017 (£10, Marks & Spencer)

The crémants made in various French regions have improved massively in recent years, with Burgundy among the places making high-class, but cut-price champagne-alikes, such as this toasty, creamy, but fruity and balanced number.

La Gioiosa Prosecco Superiore Millesimato Valdobbiadene

Veneto, Italy 2018 (£13.49, down to £8.99 from 4 Dec-2 Jan 2020, [Waitrose](#))

On the Christmas offer price, this is excellent value for a textbook vivacious prosecco. With that classic blend of frivolous, icing sugar foam, pear juiciness and easy citrus freshness, it works as solo-aperitif and Spritz or Bellini base.

Star buy:

Hunter's Offshoot Sauvignon Blanc Pet Nat

Marlborough, New Zealand 2019 (£14.95, [jeroboams.co.uk](#))

Bottled while the wine is still fermenting à la bottle-conditioned ale, and throwing up a cloudy sediment, this is a brilliantly made example of the pétillant naturel style of fizz, with tang and zip and so much ripe fresh stone fruit-flavour.

Casa Belfi Vino Bianco Biologico Frizzante

Veneto, Italy 2017 (£16.80, [lescaves.co.uk](#))

The winemaking methods mean this can't be called prosecco (it's unfiltered and with the second fermentation happening in bottle, rather than a tank). But its traditional, cloudy style is a riot of floral, savoury-yeasty, pithy citrus and apple flavour.



Raventos i Blanc Blanc de Blancs Brut

Conca del Riu Anoia, Spain 2016 (£19.95, [bbr.com](#))

The Raventos family has dropped the cava name in favour of their local appellation, but they make some of the finest fizz in Catalonia, including this poised, refreshing blend of the traditional three cava varieties, with its appetisingly bitter finish.

Devaux Oeil de Perdrix Rosé Champagne

France NV (£24.99, or £19.99 as part of a mix six, [majestic.co.uk](#))

Devaux's old favourite rosé champagne is on really good form at the moment, and if you like a bit of colour and a red-fruit cast to your fizz, with a swirl of redcurrant and raspberry and satisfyingly creamy mousse, few are better value.

Hattingley Valley Reserve

Hampshire, England NV (£29, [Tesco](#))

A quintessential modern English fizz from the talented winemaker Emma Rice,

Hattingley's refined Hampshire-built house cuvée mixes classic tingling raciness and fresh red apple fruitiness with an impressive depth of baker's shop richness.

Domaine Pierre Gerbais Cuvée Réserve

Champagne, France NV (from

£30.95, thewhiskyexchange.com; josephbarneswines.com)

A small family-owned producer based in the far south of Champagne, Domaine Pierre Gerbais makes wines of scintillating purity and mineral refreshment, with this a rare cuvee in the region that mixes pinot blanc with the chardonnay and pinot noir.

Champagne Alfred Gratien Brut

Champagne, France NV (£39.50, greatwesternwine.co.uk)

There are better-known champagne houses than Alfred Gratien, but few offer the consistency (or year-in-year-out value) of its non-vintage blend, which matches buttered-toast and tangy apple compote richness with a moreish rapier steeliness.