

Best festive bubbly

ON your behalf, bargain-conscious readers, I was going to scour Asda stores for their special (ie read, gimmick) Christmas offer of Dom Perignon 1999 vintage champagne at just £30 a bottle – £50 off the usual lowest price.

Then I discovered that the chain had acquired just 1,000 bottles to be sold through 70 chosen outlets, so DP was likely to have already flown off the shelves. This wasn't the only festive silly season stunt that went flat. Remember Woolworth's proclaiming they were flogging a champagne costing just a fiver? Never caught up with that one either.

As consolation, here is CityLife's (easily available) 2007 Festive Bubbly Best Dozen:

None of the cavas I tasted (in a price range between £7.49 and £8.49) really came up to scratch in competition with the champagnes, but two lightweight sparklers are worthy of joining the dozen.

1. Griffith Park Rosé is this year's perfect party sparkler. Reduced from £6.49 to £4.99 at Morrisons, this salmon-pink hued Aussie offers an abundance of uncomplicated creamy, strawberry fruit. It recently won gold and figured in the top 10 sparkling wines at the Effervescents du Monde international competition in France.

2. Proseccos, from Italy, make ideal, thirst quenchers, slipping down easily.

Sommariva Prosecco Il Perlino

(apenninewineshop.com, £8.49) is a subtle, frothy, pear-drop tinged mouthful.

3. Blanc de Blancs is a lighter, elegant style of champagne made solely from chardonnay. My third choice is a very affordable delight. **Sainsbury's Taste The**

Difference Vintage Blanc de Blancs 2002 (£23.59) is sourced from Duval Le-Leroy. Five years of bottle age have given it a floral complexity that's quite lovely.

4. Chardonnay rules the blend in Marks & Spencer's De Saint Gall Brut (down a fiver from £24.99), which finishes long with a persistent mousse and lots of creamy fruit.

5. Morrisons again delivers good value with **Charles de Villers Brut NV**, down from £23.99 to a bargain £13.99 until January 6. It is buttery and lingering with a beguiling palate of ripe apricots and citrus fruits.

6. Staying with supermarket bargains, the Co-op's Charles de Cazenove Tete de Cuvee Brut NV now costs £11.99, instead of £23.99. It is 50 per cent pinot noir for a richer style and it shows. On the nose it is pears and toasted brioche but on the palate red fruits mingle with pear flavours and it finishes surprisingly long.

7. I admire most of Heiseick's current range, even the sweetish demi sec, but my pick of the non-vintages is **Heidsieck Monopole Blue Top** (Tesco, Morrison, Somerfield, Oddbins, from £18.29), a toasty, biscuity treat preferable to the similarly priced Gold Top.

8. Moving into more expensive territory, a perennial favourite is the Louis Roederer Brut Premier NV (Majestic, Waitrose, Selfridges, Harvey Nichols, from £31.09). Pinot noir-dominated Brut Premier is the embodiment of the smooth house style, combining all the fruitiness and freshness of youth (apples and pears) with the vinosity of a fully mature wine (cherries, almonds).

Roederer was the winner at last night's 2007 Champagne Awards, held at the Alderley Edge Hotel.

9. Similarly, I am rarely disappointed by any of the Taittinger champagnes. This year

both the Taittinger Brut Reserve NV and the Taittinger Brut 2002 Vintage (widely available at £28.99 and £34.99 respectively) were exquisite, but they were pipped by **Taittinger Prestige Rose NV** (Oddbins, Majestic, Threshers and Selfridges, £35.99).

This blend from different harvests is a brilliant intense pink, with a persistent mousse and a nose of raspberry and blackcurrant. Complex and seductive stuff.

10. A wild card at No.10. Franciacorta is a small region in Lombardy in northern Italy, supplying distinctive champagne method fizz to fashionable Milan. The **Mirabella Saten Franciacorta** (apenninewineshop.com) was clean and appley but finished short. For the same price, £14, though, the copper-coloured **Cuvée Demetra Franciacorta Mirabella**, a chardonnay and pinot bianco blend with 20 per cent pinot noir, offered lots of red currant fruit. The wine list suggests sugared almonds in this unusual rosé!

11. In a good year, a little bottle age can work wonders for champagne. Hence my delight at **Laurent Perrier Brut 1999 Vintage**. On the nose there is pineapple and peach. It tastes silky and persistently of vanilla and preserved fruit. Expect to pay from £34.99 at Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Majestic and Oddbins.

12. If you are planning to give champers as a present, stylish presentation is essential. **Canard-Duchêne's Grande Cuvee Charles VII Brut** comes in an embossed metal gift box, but this elegant, fruity bubbly, with a lemony nose and mineral edge, won't break the bank at its rrp of £28. It is available from House of Fraser and costs just £19.99 at Majestic on a buy one, get one free offer.

Finally (and beyond the dozen because you can never get enough

champagne!) it's time to go for broke. **Mumm Cuvee R Lalou 1998** will cost you £100 at Selfridges and is very special. As it should be at that price. It's a blend of 50 per cent chardonnay and 50 per cent pinot noir from Mumm's finest parcels, aged for nine months in new oak. It is divinely crisp and toasty and has hints of honey and marmalade. Who needs bargain Dom Perignon?

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