



**DOERR DALLAS
VALUATIONS**



Dave Dallas
Old Master Specialist

CHRISTMAS WINES

CHRISTMAS TIPS FROM A SEASONED TIPPLER

“Any fool can serve a good wine by spending a fortune on it”, my father used to say, “but the trick is finding something delicious to drink that isn’t ruinously expensive”. He was particularly good at it and I have tried to emulate him.

With Christmas around the corner, expenditure at an annual high and entertaining on a larger scale than normal, I thought it might be helpful to share some things I have found or been introduced to by Hels, my P.A., that Serena, my wife, and I have enjoyed drinking without breaking the bank.

I am going to do this in a chronological order, starting with aperitifs, first course companions and then what to have with meat, fish and, of course, Turkey, and finally, what to drink with cheese and pudding.

I know next to nothing about spirits, so if Milk Gin is your tippie or you adore cocktails pre-prandial, forget my wine choices and go for things you like.

At times of celebration one immediately thinks of Champagne, but when it's going to be drunk in industrial quantities, one tends to think again. Do you really want to spend between £35 and £55 a bottle for an average Champagne?.

Instead, we drink the Crémant de Bordeaux that Jane Macquitty habitually praises in The Times. It comes from M&S at £10 a bottle and has small bubbles, which I like, as I'm prone to sneezing if they get too big, and has a creamy texture. In fact, try any of the Crémants from Bordeaux, the Loire, Jura or Bourgogne. They are made the same way as Champagne but don't come from the region so have to be called something else by French Law, and cost a fraction of the real thing.



Crémant de Bordeaux

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If you don't like fizzy drinks, you might like to try something white and light. I agree with my dear friend Ben Collins, who co-owned Bibendum and tragically died two years ago. He liked to drink thin, slightly astringent wines on an empty stomach and a more robust Chardonnay, like a white Burgundy, when accompanied by food. I like the grape varieties Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Torrontes, Albarino and Assyrtiko in this category, where acidity and minerality are the buzzwords.

In the under £10 price range, try Ned, a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc from Majestic and Marques de los Zancos from Tesco, a bargain at £5.85.



Marques de los Zancos

Now we have arrived at the moment critique! Many of my friends have become disaffected with Turkey, as the legs (the only flavoursome bits) dry out before the breast is cooked and you can't spatchcock a bird that is meant to be full of stuffing, they go for beef instead. Whatever meat you choose, or vegetable if you are vegetarian/vegan, try a red wine.

There is little point buying cheap red burgundy (Pinot Noir) as it doesn't taste of anything and even when you spend £100 a bottle for red wines from this region, it is easy to be disappointed. I would go for a claret, (the red wine of Bordeaux) and my favourite in the reasonable price range is Château Beaumont. It is a vast estate in the Haut Medoc, just under 280 acres and producing, on average, half a million bottles of delicious, well-made Claret every year. Your best bet is to buy it well in advance of using it, i.e. about six years. The 2020 is readily available, although not yet drinkable for £10 a bottle in bond. You then have to pay duty, currently at £2.67 a bottle and VAT at 20% on the total, to take it out of bond, but it is well worth the effort. The 2014 is drinking now and is available from Richard Kihl in Suffolk, still at £10 a bottle in bond, which works out at £15.20 a bottle delivered.



Chateau Beaumont

If £15.20 is beyond your budget, you could do a lot worse than buying Cote du Rhone from Lidl at £5.29 a bottle. Like the Beaumont, it will benefit from a couple of years aging so that the tannins are absorbed, otherwise, it is totally drinkable now.



Cote du Rhone

Next comes the Stilton. It has such a strong flavour that it overwhelms most wines, but not the fortified ones. So, I would recommend Port with this course. A vintage port from a great year such as Fonseca 1994 will set you back £100+. From a less good year, say 2003, you are still looking at spending between £35 and £50. However, if you plump for late bottled Vintage Port, such as Taylor Fladgate's, LBV 2016 from Wand Wines or Hard to Find Wines for £15.99, you will find a delicious round and hearty glass that punches the same weight as the cheese.

Finally, what about pudding wine? I think that most sweet things at Christmas are so sugary – Christmas Pudding, brandy butter, mince pies that to have a sweet wine with them would be cloying. Open some more Cremant!

However, if you are serving Foie Gras or a pudding that is quite tart, a Sauternes is your answer. Of course, Chateau d' Yquem is by far the greatest of them all, arguably the finest wine from Bordeaux, but at £3-400 a bottle for a recent vintage, you need to have a big cheque book! A bottle of the 1811 was bought for £75,000, making it the most expensive bottle of white wine ever sold.



Sauternes

However, there is an incredibly rigorous selection policy at Yquem and the 150 pickers go through the vines picking the grapes several times, as they ripen at different speeds due to the presence or absence of Noble Rot, a fungus that weakens the skin of the grape to allow evaporation. This makes for a very sweet wine due to the percentage of sugar to liquid. In 1964 the pickers went through the vines 13 times, only for the makers to decide the grapes were sub-standard and declared a non-vintage making no Yquem at all. This doesn't mean they make no wine in such a year. In most years only the best grapes are used and the lesser ones go into a 'de-classified' wine, such as "Sauternes" from Vineyards Direct, which was selling for £16 a half bottle when released. Try and find one of these.

To end on a note of thrift, Christmas is the time to search for that bottle of wine a friend brought you and you know you would hate and had put aside for the Tombola at the village fete. This is a gift that is heaven-sent for mulled wine, where the wine is just a vehicle for cinnamon, orange peel, cloves and nutmeg and where the heating process ruins the wine. A glass of mulled wine on a cold winter's day is a thing of good cheer. Enjoy it and have a very Happy Christmas.