

Jancis Robinson



'Germany is producing truly fine dry wines that tend to be much better partners for food than many a white burgundy

Dry and crisp and even

I reckon I tasted almost 8,000 wines over the past 12 months. The tasting notes database of JancisRobinson.com lists 6,516 supplied by me during that period, and I am all too aware that I taste many a wine at meals that I fail to write a note on. Of all the wines I described, 2,618 were white and just 138 were pink, leaving the majority red – a disproportionately large fraction, considering that the British still drink more white than red (48 per cent to 41 per cent of total consumption).

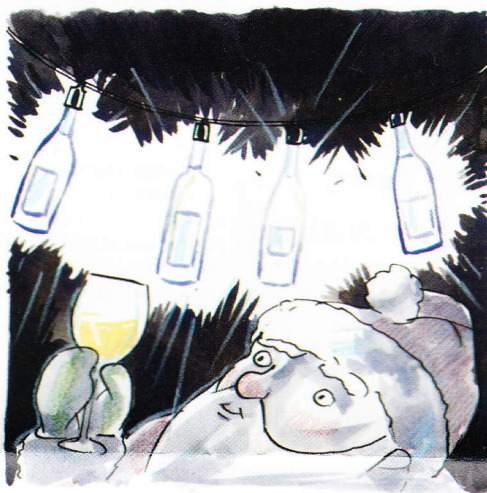
I taste a high proportion of wines to which no retail price is (yet) assigned, but I was able to write GV, for good value, in 166 of my white wine tasting notes last year.

One wine I thought GV and delightfully tense is Jean-Marc Vincent, Beaurepaire Premier Cru 2013 Santenay, on offer from The Wine Society at £29. This should age well. Marc Roy, Les Champs Perdrix 2013 Marsannay, (£24.73 OW Loeb) is from one of the less glamorous villages but is a delicate and beautiful wine made by the feisty Alexandrine Roy and just starting to drink well.

The lesser 2014 white burgundies are just starting to show well, and this was a superb vintage for them – generally more exciting for whites than the riper 2015 vintage that resulted in fatter whites. The clever choice is, of course, Chablis, because the 2014 vintage was superb there and there is a dire shortage of Chablis in 2015 and, particularly, 2016. Most 2014s will also have been imported into the UK when sterling was worth something.

Bernard Defaix, Côte de Lechet Premier Cru 2014 Chablis is outstanding and, unusually for this admirably tightly wound vintage, already drinking well. Succulent, without losing its “wet stones” Chablis character, it is a bargain at £18.30 from Domaine Direct (from whom you must buy at least 12 bottles but they may be mixed) and £19.95 per single bottle from Stainton Wines of Kendal.

Samuel Billaud, once of Billaud-Simon but now with his own domaine, is a rising star of Chablis. His wines are imported into the UK by Montrachet (named after a white burgundy that is no longer affordable and, in 2016, yielded so few grapes that six of the top producers, including Lafon, Leflaive and Domaine de la Romanée Conti, pooled their grapes and filled



MORE WELL-PRICED FESTIVE WHITES

- Kumeu River, Village Chardonnay 2014 New Zealand £9.95 *The Wine Society*
- Fattoria San Francesco 2015 Cirò £11.95 *Jeroboams*
- La Guardiense, Janare Pietralata Greco 2014 Sannio £12.50 *Jeroboams*
- Mâquina & Tabla, Páramos de Nicasia Brut Grand Cru 2014 Rueda £13.95 *Lea & Sandeman*
- Stift Göttweig, Göttweiger Berg Riesling 2015 Kremstal £14.23 *OW Loeb*
- Patrick Piuze 2014 Petit Chablis £14.50 *Wine Source*
- Clos des Lunes, Lune d'Argent 2014 Bordeaux £14.50 *Berry Bros & Rudd*

- David & Nadia Sadie, Paardebosch Chenin Blanc 2015 Swartland £15.12 *OW Loeb*
- Crawford River, Young Vines Riesling 2013 Henty £18.54 *OW Loeb*
- Mustiguillo, Finca Calvestra Mereguera 2013 Vino de España £18.95 *Berry Bros & Rudd*
- Blanchard & Lurton, Grand Vin 2014 Uco Valley, Argentina £21.50 *Berry Bros & Rudd*
- Dom Bruno Colin, Les Chaumées Premier Cru 2014 Chassagne-Montrachet £54 *Domaine Direct*

just two barrels). Montrachet currently offers Samuel Billaud, Séchet Premier Cru 2014 Chablis, made from 70-year-old vines, for £225 a dozen in bond, £300 including duty and VAT.

Raveneau is arguably the most revered Chablis producer but others who made 2014s that impressed me include Adhémaret Francis Boudin, Gilles et Nathalie Fèvre, Moreau-Naudet, Pinson, Isabelle et Denis Pommier, Servin and Verget.

However, many wine lovers, bruised by having to pour bottles of expensive, prematurely oxidised wine down the sink, are still wary of white burgundy. Fortunately, I can commend a superior alternative.

What do I have to do to convince them that Germany is now producing truly fine dry wines that tend to be much better partners for food than oaked white wines such as many a white burgundy? The examples at the top of the tree, generally called Grosses Gewächs, tend to have prices boosted by local demand but there are many alternatives that are much better value. The best producers of the Nahe – Dönnhoff, Emrich Schönleber, Schäfer-Fröhlich and, nowadays, Schlossgut Diel – can provide just the right blend of fully ripe Riesling fruit (thank you, global warming) with mouthwatering freshness.

I was very taken by Schäfer-Fröhlich, Bockenauer Schiefergestein Riesling trocken 2015, effectively the little brother of the Grosse Gewächs from its celebrated Felsenack vineyard. It is currently retailing in Germany for well under €20 and in the US for less than \$40. My guess is that it will continue to provide ever more intriguing drinking until the end of the next decade at least. Rheinhessen producers such as Battenfield-Spanier, Dreissigacker, Kühling-Gillot, Wagner Stempel and Stefan Winter, in the wake of such luminaries as Keller and Wittmann, can also offer great value. 2015 was a great vintage.

The other three most obvious sources of top-quality dry Riesling are the three As: Alsace, Austria and Australia. Grosset, Springvale Riesling 2015 Clare Valley from Australia's king of Riesling is stunning, already accessible and fairly easy to find for under £20 a bottle, the same sort of price as the biodynamic, gloriously complex Albert Mann, Cuvée Albert Riesling 2014 Alsace that seems to be quite widely exported. Even better value is the particularly successful Mitchell, Watervale Riesling 2014 Clare Valley at £12.95 from Tanners. ▶