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Jamie Goode

Our expert picks his top festive food wines – and that's just for starters

Christmas cooking deserves something extra special in the wine department, so this week I've scoured the shelves and the web for 14 of the finest bottles you can buy. Most of my choices are versatile food wines, from a rich white Bordeaux to an affordable red from Burgundy and a silky-smooth Minervois with bags of character, so they'll work a treat with the canapés and starters on the previous page. But I haven't stopped there – I've also thrown in some fabulous fizz. Sparkling wine works well with food, so you might consider pushing the boat out and serving bubbles all the way to the turkey. Well, it's only Christmas once a year, isn't it?

1. Tesco Finest Premier Cru Champagne NV, France
£19.99, Tesco, 12.5% alcohol
Offering good value for money, this is a stylish chardonnay-dominated champagne with taut, pure flavours of citrus and pear, plus a hint of spice. It's very fresh and lively.

2. Champagne Ruinart Blanc de Blancs NV, France
£45, Majestic, 12.5% alcohol
Beautifully packaged, this stylish champagne would be the perfect Christmas treat. It's fine, fresh and precise with ripe, sweet pear and citrus fruit and hints of moreish melon. There's lovely purity and precision in this bottle.

3. Asda Extra Special Viognier 2012, Pays d'Oc IGP, France
£7, Asda, 13.5% alcohol
A richly textured, fresh dry white with plenty of character, this has fruity

pear, peach and spice flavours. It would be great with the Christmas-cracker spring rolls.

4. Le Coin Sauvignon Gris 2012 Bordeaux, France
£10.49, www.laithwaites.co.uk (0845 194 7711), 12.5% alcohol
Here's an interesting white Bordeaux made from the sauvignon gris grape, which is a bit richer and more intense than sauvignon blanc.

It has rich, ripe pear and peach flavours countered by grapefruit and lemon freshness. Try it with the star anise pork belly squares and apple matchsticks.

5. Château Mukhrani Saperavi 2012, Georgia £9.49, Marks & Spencer, 13.5% alcohol
This is a Georgian wine made with the local saperavi grape variety, and it's just brilliant. Ripe, dense, sweet cherry and blackcurrant fruit tantalise the taste buds, and it's a perfect foil for the roasted winter vegetables with a herby dip.

6. Gérard Bertrand Syrah/Carignan 2010, Minervois, France
£8.99, Waitrose, 13% alcohol
There's a distinctive house style to the red wines made by ex-rugby player Gérard Bertrand: they all have a silky-smooth personality. This has warm, ripe, liqueur-like cherry fruit with some black-tea notes adding complexity and making it a great pairing for beef and potato rostis.

7. Sainte Martine Rouge 2012, Vin de Pays de l'Aude, France
£5.99, Tesco, 11.5% alcohol

Here's a fresh, light, peppery red from the south of France that isn't pretending to be anything other than an honest and very drinkable wine. With its spicy cherry fruit, this would be ideal with the mini pork pies and cranberries.

8. Domaine de la Noblaie Chinon 2011, Loire, France
£9.99, Co-op, 13.5% alcohol
Loire reds like this chinon, made from the cabernet franc grape, are light, leafy and elegant, and brimming with black-cherry and raspberry fruit. With its lighter body and lovely vivid red and black fruits, this would be a good match for the duck liver pâté on toast.

9. Marquês de Borba Branco 2012, Alentejo, Portugal
£8.90, www.tanners-wines.co.uk (01743 234455), 12.5% alcohol
Fruity, bright and precise, this is a characterful dry white from the south of Portugal, made using a blend of local varieties plus international traveller viognier. The lemon, melon, pear and peach fruit flavours in this bottle would go a treat with the smoked salmon and cucumber salad starter. It's good value for money, too.

10. Villa Maria Private Bin Sauvignon Blanc 2012, Marlborough, New Zealand
£10, www.asda.com/wineshop, 13% alcohol
New Zealand sauvignon has a gorgeous combination of fresh, green flavours with riper tropical notes, and this example from the

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ever-reliable Villa Maria estate is precise and lively. It's tough to find a perfect match for luxurious quails' eggs, asparagus and caviar, but I think this could pull it off.

11. M&S Tasmania Pinot Noir 2011, Australia £10.99,
Marks & Spencer, 13% alcohol
Bursting with crisp red cherries, this pinot noir has attractive, direct, supple fruit with some herb and spice notes adding complexity. Try it as a foil to the mushroom and truffle tartlets.

12. Tercius Alvarinho 2011 Vinho Verde, Portugal £10.99,
Marks & Spencer, 13.5% alcohol
Vinho verde is a Portuguese white that's frequently light, tart and a bit fizzy. But not this upmarket example, which is bursting with ripe pear and white-peach fruit with a citrusy core and some nice melony richness. It would be well suited to the scallops.

13. Benedict Slovenian White 2012, Slovenia
£7.50, www.thewinesociety.com (01438 741177), 13% alcohol
An unusual blend of riesling, pinot gris and furmint from Slovenia, this

is a fresh, floral white with delicious flavours of peach and citrus fruit. I reckon it would work well with the crab gratin with a herb crust.

14. Louis Latour Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2012, Burgundy, France £11.99, Majestic, 13% alcohol
Celebrity red grape pinot noir hails from Burgundy, but it's rare to find even vaguely affordable examples that taste good. This one, with its lovely, silky, red-cherry and plum fruit, fits the bill. It would be a good match for the beetroot, Gorgonzola and pear salad. 🍷



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