



Choosing The Grape

Wine need not be a pretentious topic. Most of us have an idea of what tastes we like, we want to get reasonable value for the money we spend and, bar the occasional example of 'Chateau Antifreeze', we get exactly that. Supermarket chains have ensured through their bulk purchasing and quality control, that wines nobody else will buy are no longer dumped on the British market.

Price There is still enormous choice in the everyday drinking wines. Price is usually a reliable guide to quality but prices can vary by up to 20%. So it pays to shop around.

Where you go depends simply on what you are buying. For example, in the depths of winter for around £2 you can't better a supermarket for a Corbiers: a red that smells and tastes of blackberries and, slightly warmed before drinking, goes well with sausages. It sells for between £1.89 - £2.19 at Sainsbury's, Tesco's or Asda, but you'll pay at least an extra £1 for it from a wine merchant. Alternatively, if you're after a present or something special - vintage port for instance - a wine merchant is definitely the place to go. A few phone calls can save up to £5 on a bottle of 1977 Grahams.

The basic price, though, is dictated by fixed costs; the bottle, labelling, corking, shipping, duty and VAT. For

most French wines this will be in the range of £1.40 - £1.55. So buying wine at £2.50 rather than £2 should, at least in theory, give you double the quality for the product you are really buying. Currency fluctuations and the quality and quantity of the vintage do not affect the cheaper brands. But these factors do affect clarets and burgundies at the top of the range, and if you are buying an older wine, interest rates will have had an effect too.

Big Bottles A gallant attempt has been made in one or two supermarkets to decrease the unit price in the cheaper range of wines by the introduction of plastic bottles in the *vin de table* reds. Certainly this helps save the odd few pence, as should buying in bigger bottles - one or one-and-a-half litre bottles of wine should save fixed unit prices. Yet, in this country, these have not proved to be significant to the consumer. Indeed, buying big bottles of top quality claret could cost you more. What really saves the consumer money, however, is when retailer purchases the crop of an entire vineyard.

What of the tastes? Regrettably there are still many who will not touch a red because it gives them a 'bad head'. This is perhaps a hangover from the pre-EEC days when Spanish plonk was the only affordable wine in Britain. But it is interesting to note that the Common Agricultural Policy brought us expensive butter, milk and meat, but wine that, in real terms, is cheaper.

Reds The number of times I have produced a red to be greeted with 'no thanks I would prefer a white', astounds me. But I remember that that was my view 10 years back. Whereas often reds do have more additives than whites, neither should cause a headache without over-indulgence. More importantly, reds have a range of complexity not shared by white wines and, the greater the familiarity, the more they become apparent. Reds are also underrated: 'watery - neither one thing or the other'. But, try a cooled bottle of rose with strong fla-

voured food such as a bacon joint or duck perhaps, and it comes alive.

Generally, the wine you choose will depend on the circumstances: whether you are eating or not, what the season of the year is and perhaps the time of day. So keep a note of what you liked and what went with it: don't bother with the vintage, taste, smell, colour and the like, and mark it out of 10. My most startling memory was of a bottle of 'Beaumes de Venise', a sickly sweet dessert wine I would not normally touch. One small glass with a fruit salad and cream changed my whole view, and

I spent the next day hunting down a bottle.

Wine is shrouded in mystery and verbiage. The result is people sheltering behind the safety of a Liebfraumilch when the shops are filled with a massive variety of tastes and qualities waiting to be discovered.

'Balance', 'finesse' and 'palates', are all mystifications. But wine, like food, is personal and mood or atmosphere can be all-important. So, be adventurous and ignore dogmatic assessments particularly when dressed up in verbiage. •
Mark Sanders

Italian Wine Offer

Marxism Today are offering two exclusive cases of Italian wines which are highly recommended. For just over £2 per bottle, there is a Chianti with a strong fruity flavour; a pleasant, earthy Valpolicella; a Frascati, and a refreshing Soave which you should try well-cooled with a Chinese meal. This case (Case A) is available to *MT* readers at £25.99.

Case B is a superior selection which is reasonably priced at £3.30 or so a bottle.

The Valpolicella is the star, with a strong taste of cherries, and will certainly improve further if you wish to store it away. The Barbaresco is a very light red, properly mature, and is the real bargain in this package. In addition, there is a dry white, delicate Orvietto, and a lemony Verdichio. Both are excellent with seafood or a summer picnic. Well worth trying and good value at £39.99.

But, remember, keep a note of your reactions...

Marxism Today Wine Offer: Two mixed cases of Italian wine			
Case A: 3 bottles each of: Valpolicella Classico 1983 Chianti D.O.C. 1983 Soave Classico 1984 Frascati 1984	Case B: 3 bottles each of: Barbaresco 1979 Moro, Valpolicella Classico Superiore 1984 Verdichio Classico 1984 Orvietto Classico Secco 1984		
Fill in the form below and post to: Marxism Today Wine Offer, FREEPOST, 16 St John Street, London EC1R 1JB			
Product	Price	Qty.	Value
Case A.	£25.99		
Case B.	£39.99		
Total			
Carrriage (1 case £5, 2-5 cases £3/case, 6-9 cases £2/case, 10 cases free)			
Grand Total			
Cheques payable to: Salamis & Co. Ltd.			
Please send wine to:			
Name _____			
Address _____			
Postcode _____			
Access/Visa _____			
Signature _____			