

## WINE

## SEEING RED

**Charlotte Lessing** selects tempting treats, ranging from one under £3 to a special occasion buy at over £40

## GREAT VALUE

The cheapest great-value red I have come across is *La Serrana Tempranillo*, a lovely, soft, round, silky red (Majestic, £2.99). Also from Spain, *Dragon Tempranillo 2003*, Berberana, from Barros (Majestic, £4.99), which won the Great Value Trophy red from the Wine Challenge. If you buy two bottles of this latter bargain you get them for £3.99 each.

My own great favourite, which I gave to many at Christmas, is the *Carrascal*, from Cavas de Weinert in Argentina. This blend of malbec, cabernet sauvignon and merlot is a rich, red and ripe, powerful beauty at only £5.99, or £5.49 for two bottles (Majestic).

I visited this little known winery in the Lujan de Cuyo area of Mendoza some years ago and was seduced into buying a superb and much more expensive single bottle of a Weinert wonder. I never believed he could produce such excellence at this price.

Just remember that you have to buy a case of 12 from Majestic, although they can be mixed, and any price.

## AWARD-WINNERS

From the International Wine Challenge include two from Sainsbury, which are also great value: the *Reserve Selection Chilean Cabernet 2003* (Silver Medal) at £4.50 and the Trophy award-winning *Vina Errazuriz Merlot 2004* at £6.40.

The judging is always done "blind" and it is often a great surprise to the judges to find later that some of their highest awards go to such low-priced wines.

From Waitrose there is always a good assortment

of inexpensive reds. The best and most interesting bargain I have come across is its amazing £4.99 *Paul Mas Marselan 2004* from the Languedoc. Marselan is a relatively new grape, which is a hybrid of cabernet sauvignon and grenache. It has the firm structure of the cabernet and the elegance and dark fruit flavours of the grenache – great with poultry or meat roasts.

Two new Douro DOC wines include the *Altano 2003* at only £4.99, a good quaffing number, and the *Altano Reserva 2000*, a more intense and complex wine with great dark fruit aromas and lasting flavours, for £8.99.

If you want to knock out the February blues with a stunning red, the *Jack Mann Cabernet Sauvignon 1999* is the flagship wine of the Houghton winery, from Australia's Frankland River region. It is powerful, generous and graceful. Jack Mann was a legendary character who produced 51 consecutive vintages in his lifetime. He would be proud of this one, which is as good as it gets, from the 30-year old vines.

The fruit is ripe, the tannins soft but serious and the "old-fashioned" touch of sediment in the bottle is a good sign for this wine. Sip serenely and surrender – and do not even think about the price, a mere £42.53. (The Wine Society – see below; Jeroboams, 020-7259 6716; or www.virginwine.com.)

## GOOD WINE NEWS

Wines by mail order and online have been growing in acceptance and confidence. The Wine Society has been known for years for its high



**An interesting bargain – Paul Mas Marselan 2004, elegant red with dark fruit flavours**

standard and reliability, owned by its members and for whom it is quite unique in the range and selections of the mixed cases on offer. To join, call 01438-741177 (or visit the website at: www.thewinesociety.com). Last autumn it again won the Wine Challenge award for this category.

Another long-established company, Berry Bros & Rudd, which has one of the few surviving 18th-century shop-fronts in St James, London SW1, has become very modern and wide-ranging. It is once again a runner-up in the Mail Order/Online Award Category.

Now it has created the Berrys' Wine Club with wines at all levels, and special offers, tastings and luxury services (0870-900 4300; www.bbr.com). There are, of course, rare and costly wines, but Berrys' House Red, at £4.50 is, according to distinguished wine expert Michael Broadbent, "exceptionally good value and delicious".

\* Private Cellar is a small, exclusive private company covering a range of wines, from rarer vintages, as well as wines sourced directly from the vineyards. Some

Our Wine Correspondent Charlotte Lessing has had a distinguished career. She was Editor of *Good Housekeeping* for many years, and now concentrates on writing about wine and travel. She was awarded the 1995 Champagne Taittinger Award by the Wine Guild of the UK for her articles in *The Lady*.



of them are brilliant and pricey, others are great value.

This company was started by three experienced and talented people who had spent years at Corney & Barrow – Andrew Gordon is the Managing Director, Nicola Arcedeckne-Butler, MW, is the Wine Buyer, and Laura Taylor is the Marketing Head.

They are a formidable trio now at Private Cellar with a tantalising wine list and many personal customer services, from help with special parties, weddings, cellars and advice.

I am going to recommend two stunning bargain Côtes du Rhône wines at only £6.50 and £8.95. The first is *Château Beauchêne 2003* aged in oak for four months and with supple and soft tannins, 13% vol. The second, *Château Beauchêne Premier Terroir, 2003*, aged in oak for 12 months, is a big, richer, deeper wine with great length of flavour and length, 13.5% vol. It would stand up well to all meats and big cheeses.

Both are excellent value, but I personally would choose the top one at £2.45 more a bottle, and drink one glass of the latter rather than two of the cheaper.

If you would like to buy a case of either, Private Cellar is offering a 10% discount on all orders that are placed before 16 March 2006.

To order, contact Private Cellar, 51 High Street, Wicken, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 5XR (01353-721999; fax: 013533-724074; email: orders@privatecellar.co.uk).

Please quote *The Lady* when ordering. 