

SPECTATOR WINE CLUB

SIMON HOGGART

A visit to the London International Wine Fair is, paradoxically, a sobering experience. With about 30,000 different wines on show, it is impossible to sample more than a minuscule number — the worst anyone can be accused of is binge-sipping. The stallholders want you to try all their wines, even if there are a dozen of them. My technique: 'I'm in a great hurry. Let me try your best wine', was usually met by 'All ours are excellent. Now, I will start at the beginning...'

I acquired a list of all the best-selling — by value — alcoholic drinks in the UK. You may be surprised to learn that the top booze brand of all is Stella Artois, on which we spend an average £10 million a week. The leading wine brand is Hardy's — £254 million a year, with the Americans, Gallo and Blossom Hill, close behind. There are around two dozen wine brands in the top 100, and I'm proud that I have never recommended any to you. Some do produce good wines — Lanson, Moët, Oyster Bay, Wolf Blass, etc. Pondering others, we will calm our queasy stomachs and turn away.

Which is why we try to choose from independent, picky wine merchants who have direct contact with the growers, many of whom produce wonderful wines in modest quantities. Several have been collected here in an offer made by Hedley Wright, an enterprising wine merchant based in Hertfordshire. For example, the Sauvignon Blanc from Touraine, the Domaine des Chezelles 2007 (1), is a fine example of what is coming from the less fashionable areas of France. It is crisp, dry, yet with an irresistibly fruity flavour. Tasting blind, you would put it as a rather agreeable Sancerre — without the Sancerre price tag. At an informal tasting on a sunny summer evening, it disappeared down grateful gullets in no time. Reduced by a pound from £7.49 to £6.49.

The next wine is more of an experiment. It is made in South Africa by the Rustenberg people from a little-known grape, the Grenache Blanc, but it's lovely — and exclusive to *The Spectator*. The 2007 (2) is slightly musky, herby, spicy but with a citrus tang, which makes it perfect for summer parties. If you fear it might be a little exotic, try it in the sample case — you may very well want to order more. Reduced from £7.99 to £6.99.

I don't know anyone who doesn't like white Burgundy. Such people must exist, like black swans, but I never seem to come across them. The problem for us fans is usually price, but not with this Macon Charnay, Clos des Tourons 2007 (3), which has been cut again by £1 to £8.49. It has all the rich, ripe, peach and vanilla flavour of a good Burgundy at a very good price. A wine to serve to people you like a lot.



Last year Hedley Wright sold a lot of this delicious pink sparkler, the Taltarni Brut Taché 2005 (4). It is made in Tasmania from the three classic Champagne grapes — Chardonnay plus two types of Pinot — with a dash of Shiraz thrown in to give it colour and just a little more depth. The result is a wine that looks happy and bouncy and spritzy, and will give you the same feeling. Just right for an aperitif, but would also go perfectly with salmon or poultry. Reduced from £11.99 to a most attractive £10.49.

Now the reds. The L'Eglise Grenache Merlot 2007 (5) from southern France is a really nice summer wine, smooth, easy drinking, with bags of flavour to stand up to food or just to glug with pleasure before a government minister marches up and tells you how many units it contains. (Did you know that a unit is an entirely arbitrary measure, and of course tells you nothing about body weight or metabolism? I expect you did.) The wine is reduced from £6.25 to £5.49.

Finally, I loved the Silencio Tinto Joven 2006 (6) from the Ribera del Duero. The greatest wines of both Spain and Portugal come from the banks of this river. Personally, I think they are far classier than the run of Riojas, having weight and backbone along with their rich, plummy, cedar and damson flavours. This is a very fine wine at a very decent price, £6.49 — a whopping 19 per cent off its £7.99 regular price.

There is a sample case reduced by a further £4. Delivery, as ever, is free and there are substantial discounts for larger orders: take £10 off a total order for two cases, £20 off three, and £35 off a four-case order.

Order form Spectator wine club

www.spectator.co.uk/the-wine-club

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			Price	No
White	1	Sauvignon Blanc, Dme des Chezelles 2007	£77.88	
	2	Brampton Grenache Blanc 2007	£83.88	
	3	Macon Charnay, Clos des Tourons 2007	£101.88	
Rosé	4	Taltarni Brut Taché 2005	£125.88	
Red	5	L'Eglise, Grenache Merlot 2007	£65.88	
	6	Ribera del Duero, Silencio Tinto Joven 2006	£77.88	
Mixed	7	Sample case, two each of all the above	£84.88	

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Prices include VAT and delivery on the British mainland. Payment should be made either by cheque with the order, payable to Hedley Wright Wine Merchants, or by Mastercard, Visa, American Express or Switch details of which may be telephoned or faxed. This offer, which is subject to availability, closes on 31 July 2008.

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