

Have a vintage celebration

Fortified 'stickies', bright whites: a second round of festive tipples

I never tire of refreshing whites but in winter I also like wines that have layers, texture and, whether oaked or not, are perhaps a little richer than the ones I'd seek out at the end of a summer's day.

That's why, on my pick of winter whites, you'll find a zesty, clementine-scented house white to drink cold from the fridge and pour at parties; a sauvignon blanc that has been partially fermented in the barrel, is as succulent and juicy as a peach and tastes all the better for having had a bit of time to mellow; a sit-up-smart white burgundy that will kaleidoscope through several moods as you leave it in the glass; and a marzipan-paste-like roussanne that glows with flavour.

At Christmas,

of course, we also drink more sweet and fortified wine – port, sherry, madeira and all the rest – than at any other time of year. My pick of all the ones assembled to the right would be the Fortnum & Mason madeira.

Madeira is a peculiar wine; this autumn I tasted a couple that were more than a century old and seemed almost immortal. By those standards the Barbeito Malvasia Single Cask 2001 is, at a mere

10 years, a youngster but it's a glorious and complex drink. I'd sip it if I were nibbling away at a plateful of cheese, though the chef Fergus Henderson, who prefers his madeira for elevenses, has also alerted me to the fact that it goes perfectly with a slice of caraway seed cake.

Next week

© In the final part of our Christmas wines bonanza, you'll find all the best fizz including party prosecco and top-notch vintage champagne. Happy drinking!

PART 2
THE WHITES,
PORTS AND
SHERRIES
YOU'LL LOVE

Malvasia Barbeito Single Cask Madeira 2001

18.5%: £23.50 for 50cl, Fortnum & Mason

An exceptionally fine madeira and one that, since it comes from the clue's in the name) a single cask, is in very limited supply. Incredibly concentrated and complex, with layers and layers of raisins, hazelnuts, skeins of coffee... it just goes on and on. Take a glass and contemplate it by the fire.

Vintage Port 2007 Portugal

20%: M&S, £25

A bargain of a vintage port. Still young – so you could either decant before drinking or squirrel some away for another year (or do both) – it's alert and intense and streaked with mineral flavours. You can almost taste the schist of the terraces on which the grapes are grown.

Fernando de Castilla Antique Oloroso NV Spain

20%: Waitrose, £22.99 for 50cl

Fernando de Castilla makes spell-bindingly good sherry but not, alas, very much of it so this is tricky to get hold of. Dark amber in colour, implacably dry, this is the liquid equivalent of a palimpsest, carrying imprints of walnuts, raisins, orange rind and old oak.

Felsina Berardenga Vin Santo Chianti Classico 2001

16%: Waitrose Wine Direct and one branch, £29.99

An unusually fine Vin Santo from an excellent producer based on the southern edge of the Chianti Classico district. It would be a waste to dip cantucci in this one.

SWEET & FORTIFIED
WINTER WARMERS BY THE GLASS

Sainsbury's Muscat de St Jean de Minervois NV

15%: Sainsbury's, £4.79 for 375ml

A truly delightful, pretty, orange blossom and fresh-grape-scented sweet wine.

Finest Reserve Port NV

20%: M&S, £8.99 down from £11.99, from Nov 28 to Jan 1

If you're looking for a sub-£10 port that you can use to make Cumberland Sauce, leave out as a sustaining tipple for Santa on Christmas Eve and swig on a Saturday afternoon as you cook the roast gammon, here it is. Bright, cheery and easy.

Taste the Difference 12 Amontillado

19%: Sainsbury's, £7.99 for 50cl

The TTD range of sherry is truly spectacular this year. This very-nearly-dry amontillado is made by Emilio Lustau and tastes of mocha and roasted almonds. Very good with chewy slices of jamon.

L'Îlot de Haut-Bergeron Sauternes 2008 France

14%: M&S, 150 stores only, £9.99 for 37.5cl

Some sauternes is a little too weighed down for my liking, like marmalade. This is lighter and more elegant than most, which makes it more drinkable and playful.

Yalumba Museum Muscat NV Australia

ABV 18%: Morrisons, £11.99 for 375ml

Think bonfire-night treacle toffee; the top of a creme caramel and hazelnuts. Then imagine the texture of port, with an Aussie twist, and there you have this magnificent wine.

Darting Estate Scheurebe Elswine 2009

7%: M&S, 150 stores, £18

They didn't just wait for a frost to pick these grapes, they waited until it was -10C on an icy day in December, then fermented them in stainless steel to produce this breathtaking wine. Reminiscent of marzipan and fresh apples, and incredibly light and sweet.

