

Opinion **FT Magazine**

The best white wines to drink at Christmas

'Ridiculously underpriced. Smoky fresh with a lively green streak enriched by a marzipan note'

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This is the first of four sets of my recommendations for drinking over the coming weeks. Below, in ascending price order, are the dry white wines. Bear in mind that many retailers give further discounts when a dozen mixed bottles are bought — and some insist on a minimum order of a mixed dozen.

Las Colinas del Ebro, Garnatxa Blanca 2017 Terra Alta, Spain

£9.25 Stone, Vine & Sun

Full-bodied Catalan that is larded with personality and grip on the finish. This is rich enough to stand up to game. A real bargain. 14%

Vignerons Ardéchois, Viognier Grès du Trias 2017 Coteaux de l'Ardèche, France

£9.95 The Wine Society, £11.50 Yap Bros

The Condrieu grape seems to thrive on the sandstone of the Ardèche. Dusty, smoky nose but a real undertow of spicy fruit. Unlike so many varietal Viogniers, this is more than a perfume. 14%

Von Kesselstatt, Niedermenniger Riesling Kabinett 2016 Saar, Germany

£10.50 The Wine Society

Light as a feather from the world's best hunting ground for max flavour and min alcohol. Lovely fruity purity. Brilliant refreshment and value. 9.5%

Corte Mainente, Cengelle 2017 Soave, Italy

£10.95 Stone, Vine & Sun

Yes, good Soave is alive and well in this vaguely lemony wine that would make a charming, refreshing aperitif. 12.5%

Ch Beaumont Les Pierrières 2017 Blaye Côtes de Bordeaux, France

£11.95 Lea & Sandeman

Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon all done up in a three-piece suit. Smoky nose and lots of pungency and character. No hurry to drink this. Way underpriced. 14%

Vina Laguna, Festigia Malvasia 2016 Istria, Croatia

£11.95 Lea & Sandeman

A winning combination of richness and precision. Lightly peachy flavours and great persistence but whistle clean and refreshing. For drinking with or without food. 13.5%

Monte Del Frà, Ca' Del Magro, Custoza Superiore 2016 Veneto, Italy

£12.45 Field and Fawcett

One of several extremely well-chosen Italian dry whites currently on offer from Berrys. Some of us have memories of distinctly dull Bianco di Custoza but this is broad and rich with lots of spice. Great fruit and grip. 13%

Karma do Sil, Maga Godello 2017 Ribeira Sacra, Spain

£13.95 Lea & Sandeman

Luscious but structured dry white here that seems more Burgundian than Spanish. Excellent value. 13%

De Martino, Legado Chardonnay 2017 Limarí Valley, Chile

£13.95 Berry Bros & Rudd

Absurdly fine copy of white burgundy from one of Chile's Pacific-cooled newer wine regions. 13.5%

Domaine Lyrarakis, Plytó 2017, Crete, Greece

£13.95 Berry Bros & Rudd

Like De Martino, a brilliant winemaking family going their own way. Indigenous varieties are their speciality, such as the strangely fennel-scented Dafni at £13.25 and this aromatic, floral but firm Plytó. 13%

Begude, Etoile Chardonnay 2017 Limoux, France

£14.49 Vinceremos

Crisp but with lots of personality and great balance. Not burgundy but definitely French with a note of orange peel. Fairly rich palate entry and definitely ready to drink. 13%

Haskell, Dombeya Chardonnay 2015 Stellenbosch, South Africa

£14.95 Lea & Sandeman

This extremely accomplished Chardonnay even has some age on it. Ridiculously underpriced. Smoky fresh with a lively green streak enriched by a marzipan note. 13%

Domaine Cordier, Clos du Four 2016 Mâcon-Milly-Lamartine, Burgundy, France

£14.95 The Wine Society

This wine is certainly tense and lively, with a most attractive satin texture. But, unlike the Haskell, this would never be taken for a Côte d'Or white. 13%

Akrathos Assyrtiko 2016 Halkidiki, Greece

£15 Daily Drinker

Good core of fruit and crystalline structure. This would be a delightful aperitif but has quite enough extract to be served with food — oily fish? — too. Really very delicious. 13%

Zanut, Rebula 2015 Goriska Brda, Slovenia

£15.50 Stone, Vine & Sun

Slovenian wine, especially Slovenian whites, are a well-kept secret. The Rebula grape is the local speciality. This has the trademark suggestion of green vegetation but is agreeably delicate. 12.5%

Dom Jean Teiller 2017 Menetou-Salon, Loire, France

£15.95 Yapp

Very impressive. Neither too sweet nor too tart. The owners spent a year in New Zealand apparently, which may help to explain all that fruit, but it tastes nothing like a Marlborough Sauvignon. 13%

Sybille Kuntz Riesling trocken 2016 Mosel, Germany

£16.63 Uncharted Wines, also Robert Rolls

Soaring, bright, concentrated fruit in this dry wine grown biodynamically on the steep slopes of the Mosel valley by the energetic Sybille Kuntz. To be drunk with or without food. Would make a great partner for smoked salmon. 12%

Rheingau Riesling, Selected By Eva Fricke 2016 Rheingau, Germany

£16.95 Berry Bros & Rudd

This is a zesty, dry, medium-bodied wine, typical of the sort of dry Riesling that is the norm in Germany today, evidence of Fricke's dedication to quality above all else. 12%

Luisin, Vezza D'Alba Arneis 2016 Roero, Piemonte, Italy

£17.15 Berry Bros & Rudd

Arneis can have vaguely pear-like aromas in search of an anchor but this has real substance — and a light chewiness on the end. A seriously put together wine. Not cheap but fair value. Could be served as a serious first course wine. 13.5%

Trimbach, Riesling Réserve 2015 Alsace, France

£18 The Wine Society

The basic Riesling 2015 bottling from Alsace's kings of Riesling is also a knockout, but this one will last for another 10 years at least. The small amount of residual sugar is drowned out by the searing acidity. Magnificent. Would be great with smoked salmon. 13.5%

Dominique Cornin 2015 Mâcon-Fuissé, Burgundy, France

£18.90 Domaine Direct

Another southern Burgundian that over-delivers. Lightly reductive nose. Mouthful of fresh but not fat fruit. Lots of chew on the end but quite enough bright fruit on the palate. Superior wine with a beginning, middle and end. 13%

René Lequin-Colin, Back to the Roots Chardonnay 2016 Bourgogne, Burgundy, France

£18.95 Stone, Vine & Sun

Bone dry and savoury, in the classic Burgundian fashion, at a very fair price for a Côte d'Or wine. Racy and transparent. 12.5%

Bodegas Rafael Palacios, Louro Do Bolo 2017 Valdeorras, Spain

£19.95 Berry Bros & Rudd

The great Godello grape and slate soils of Galicia are responsible for this marvel. Such freshness and direction with a minerally spine. This introductory level wine is as good as the first few vintages of As Sortes, the original top wine. Excellent value. 14%

Olivier Leflaive, Bourgogne Oncle Vincent 2016 Bourgogne, Burgundy, France

£20 The Wine Society

Negociant Olivier Leflaive of Puligny-Montrachet's Uncle Vincent was the animus behind the greater Leflaive family's Domaine Leflaive. This wine comes from Olivier's oldest vines classified as Bourgogne in a vineyard on the border of Puligny. Very respectable. 13%

Domaine Guillemot-Michel, Quintaine 2016 Viré-Clessé, Burgundy, France

£21 The Wine Society

Opulently rich but refreshingly tense too. Lots of layers going from golden syrup through honeysuckle to blossom. Maybe not for the very long term but it over-delivers in terms of pleasure. 13%

Hoddles Creek Chardonnay 2016 Yarra Valley, Australia

£21.95 Stone, Vine & Sun

Proof of Australia's new-found competence with Chardonnay. Big and rich initially but wonderfully delicate and racy on the finish. This is the stuff to challenge white burgundy! So clean but profound too. Convincing chewiness on the finish. 13.9%

Domaine Borgeot, La Chaponnière 2016 Rully, Burgundy, France

£22 Tanners

Proof that the Côte Chalonnaise to the south of the famous Côte d'Or is catching up fast. Aromatic and piercing with masses of ripe fruit and quite enough crisp acidity. Very satisfying with a lemon streak, and not at all rustic. Great balance. Persistent. 13%

Mullineux, Old Vines White 2017 Swartland, South Africa

£23.25 Berry Bros & Rudd

I have yet to be disappointed by a vintage of this wine, Andrea Mullineux's arresting, ageworthy oak-aged blend of the fruit of Swartland's ancient vines, mainly Chenin Blanc. Such class. It ages well too. 13.5%

Savage White 2017 Western Cape, South Africa

£30 The Good Wine Shop, Chiswick and Kew

Another superlative dry white blend from one of South Africa's new generation of gifted winemakers. Mainly Sauvignon Blanc this time — tense and long-fermented in old oak. Builds towards a magnificent spread of flavours. 14%

Ebner Ebenauer Grüner Veltliner Alte Reben 2017 Niederösterreich, Austria

£32 Roberson

Arrestingly intense wine from 60-year-old vines of Austria's signature grape variety, picked very ripe and fermented to dryness. 13%

Domaine Henri Germain 2015 Meursault, Burgundy, France

£45.60 Domaine Direct

Light, rather appealing struck-match quality on the nose. An unusually approachable posh white burgundy with a good balance between fruit and freshness, though it's not so concentrated that it promises a particularly long life. Great for short-term drinking and very clean. 13.5%

Next week — reds

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