

DRINKING

Tipplés as Twinkling as the Tinsel

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Whereas the ingredients for a traditional Christmas lunch have changed very little—turkey, goose, guinea fowl, beef or roast ham—followed by a rich fruit pudding, tart or gingerbread, the landscape for wine has been transformed beyond recognition.

Thirty years ago, our choice was limited to a handful of European wine-producing countries and California. These days, choosing a red wine to pair with your turkey could take you to the foothills of the Andes, the vineyards of Oregon or the sunny valleys of Australia. Such is the swathe of wines on offer that one could be forgiven for asking whether there is a country in the world that

doesn't produce wine. From Chilean Merlot to Tasmanian sparkling wine, the unlimited choice is, in reality, confusing and paralyzing. The good news is that in today's fiercely competitive wine market, with savvy buyers, improved winemaking techniques and considerable capital investment, buying a bad bottle of wine is surprisingly difficult. For the modern consumer, the challenge isn't to avoid the undrinkable but to find that interesting bottle that will inspire the taste buds and impress your guests.

This is why this year I have once again done the hard work for you, tasting my way through dozens of wines to create a manageable, bespoke selection containing a tip-

ple for every occasion. Whether it is a small nip of sloe gin after a long afternoon's walk, a glass of lighthearted sparkling wine for a festive party or an altogether richer, more complex red wine for the main meal, my simple list aims to meet your every need.

When choosing my wines, I jotted down a few helpful criteria. Would the wine pair well with most traditional Christmas recipes? Does it offer a positive price-to-quality ratio, and, lastly, what is its alcohol percentage? This last factor is important.

Faced with a month of parties, after-work drinks, celebratory lunches and dinners, the onset of palate fatigue is very real.

Where I can, I have tried to find wines

that offer purity, freshness and palate-cleansing acidity, while not containing too much alcohol. It is a view shared by two-star Michelin chef Michel Roux Jr. who says: "Something light and refreshing is definitely the way to go."

I'll certainly drink to that.

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Online»

Will Lyons shares his top wines for Christmas with Le Gavroche chef Michel Roux Jr, at WSJ.com/lifestyle.

Sparkling

Brut Cuvée Sparkling Wine
Domaine Cameros,
Napa Valley, California
Alcohol: 12%
Price: Around £16 or €20
 Under the stewardship of winemaker Eileen Crane, Taittinger's outpost in Napa is now recognized as making some of the best sparkling wine in the region. The Brut is fresh, vibrant and rich.

Sweet

Fortnum's Single Cask
Malaysia 2001
Barbeito, Madeira
Alcohol: 19%
Price: Around £23.50 or €29
 A small glass of Madeira at the end of the meal awakens the senses with its lively acidity. This has a pure copper color and a nose replete with spices, toffee, coffee and fruit-flavored candy. A zingy yet rich finish.

White

Belezos, Rioja Blanco 2010
Bodegas Zugober, Rioja
Alavesa, Spain
Alcohol: 11.5%
Price: Around £11.50 or €14
 Good white Rioja is a hidden gem. A huge waft of hedonistic creamy oak leaps from the glass, tantalizing the taste buds with its buttery appeal. The finish is soft and dry, which enables this wine to pair well with food.

Red

Château Roc de Cambes
2010, Côtes de Bourg,
Bordeaux, France
Alcohol: 14.5%
Price: Around £40 or €50
 Although a bit pricey, the Côtes de Bourg—the second wine of Bordeaux's famed Tertre Roteboeuf—certainly lives up to its billing. It has a wonderful nose of cassia and dark fruit, with a rich, silky finish. Worth decanting.

Spirits

The Glenlivet 18-year-old
The Glenlivet,
Speyside, Scotland
Alcohol: 43%
Price: Around £40 or €50
 If you're partial to an occasional dram, make this your tipples. An enormously complex whisky, it sits in the glass with a gold autumnal hue and has top notes of apple juice, toffee fudge and bitter orange.



Bollinger 2002
Bollinger, Ay,
Champagne, France
Alcohol: 12%
Price: Around £70 or €85
 For those wanting to really indulge themselves, Bollinger's latest vintage, 2002, is a rich, decadent treat. The nose smells of dabs of melted butter and taut, green fruit. Rich and complex.

Graham's 10-year-old
Tawny Graham's,
Oporto, Portugal
Alcohol: 20%
Price: Around £20 or €25
 Tawny port can be served at the end of the meal or sipped as an indulgent aperitif. This has an inviting, figgy character with a nutty, almond streak.

Riesling Kabinett 2009
Joh. Jos. Prüm, Mosel
Valley, Germany
Alcohol: 9%
Price: Around £18 or €22
 German Riesling is one of the world's most affordable fine wines. This is packed with complexity, flavor and a seemingly ever-changing floral character. A natural with food, this wine stands up to most holiday dishes.

Ser Lapo 2008
Chianti Classico Riserva
Castello di Fonterutoli, Italy
Alcohol: 13.6%
Price: Around £16 or €20
 One sniff of this outstanding Chianti and you are immediately transported into a rustic Italian kitchen. Predominantly Sangiovese with a tad of Merlot, this is a glorious, bright red wine.

Sipsmith Sloe Gin
Sipsmith Distillery, London
Alcohol: 29%
Price: Around £23 or €28
 This creamy, dark-fruit spirit from London's first new gin distillery in more than 200 years is ideal for hip flasks on cold, blustery walks.

NV Prosecco Frizzante
Rocca d'Asolo, Dal Bello,
Colli Asolani, Veneto, Italy
Alcohol: 11%
Price: Around £10 or €12
 With its lowish alcohol, fresh character and suitability as a base for cocktails, Prosecco is the ideal Christmas fizz. This example from Dal Bello has a refreshing, uplifting tang.

Cypres de Climens 2009
Château Climens, Barsac,
Bordeaux, France
Alcohol: 13.5%
Price: Around £22.50 or €27
 Château Climens is one of Sauternes's most highly rated sweet wines; this is their second wine. Golden and honeyed, it has a lemony freshness that is a wonderful accompaniment to British Christmas pudding.

Chablis 2010
Vincent Mothe,
Chablis, France
Alcohol: 12.5%
Price: Around £11 or €13.50
 A glass of crisp, clean, chilled Chablis accompanied by a portion of smoked salmon or leftover cold meats and salad is one of life's delights. This is a classic, fabulous Chardonnay with Chablis's trademark steely minerality.

St. Laurent 2010
Tinhof, Burgenland, Austria
Alcohol: 12%
Price: Around £13 or €16
 This light, fruity wine can work well as both an aperitif and as an accompaniment to the feast of the day itself—turkey. Made from the St. Laurent grape, it has a smell reminiscent of cherry or cranberry, with a gentle, uplifting acidity.

H by Hine VSOP Cognac
Hine, Cognac, France
Alcohol: 40%
Price: Around £30 or €36
 Nursing a cognac by the fire is one of the pleasures of the season and Hine is one of the most highly reputed houses. For the money, this is difficult to beat, with smooth vanilla and floral flavors.

(Left to right) Domaine Cameros; Fortnum & Mason; Bodegas Zugober; Castello di Fonterutoli; Sipsmith Distillery; The Glenlivet; Hine