

| | U3A Wine Discoverer's Christmas Lunch 'without the Turkey' 2022 | Grape Varieties | Cost £/Where from |
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| Welcome Fizz | <p>Cava Brut - Codorniu 1872 and Perelada . We have to get the party started! - and this is of course Spain's answer to Champagne and is produced (95%) in the region surrounding Barcelona by the same method and this gives it its (in my humble opinion) advantage over Prosecco. As you know I am a great fan of Cava and examples we have tried in the past have always surpassed expectations -with many of you surprised it wasn't Champagne – normally I opt for a Reserva Cava but this time reverted to a quality "ordinary" level Cava to stretch the budget and make sure there was plenty of bottles to go around! That said, this is at the top end of entry level Cava from very respected producers – I had to get two types as I cleaned Waitrose out of its Codorniu!</p> <p>The grapes in Cava are very different to Champagne's Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (although these can be used to a degree). Macabeo (which is also the grape known as Viura used for white Rioja) dominates and has frost resistance with exotic fruit and floral notes and almonds – Xarello gives a distinctive local flavour of citrus and apple brings acid and freshness and Parellada gives a crisp, apple flavour and texture and body.</p> <p>All three are white grapes and used in roughly equal proportions. The name, Cava, came about as caves or cellars were used to age the wine – the term was formally adopted to distinguish the product from Champagne which has protected geographical status. Cava dates back to around 1851 and a Spanish wine merchant travelling through France who became interested in replicating the Champagne method using Spanish wines – as Penedes vineyards had been devastated by the phylloxera louse many were replanted with white grapes to produce it. This wine almost certainly lays on its lees ("sur lie" as the French would say) – the Perelada example definitely does as it says on the back! - during the ageing process and these are then consolidated into the neck of the bottle, disgorged and then the bottle recorked.</p> <p>There are ascending (legally defined) levels of quality for Cava:- Firstly, <i>Cava</i> – 9 months ageing on lees – like a French "Cremant" style wine. (Our selection I suspect sits closer in style to a Reserva Cava). Secondly, <i>Reserva Cava</i>– minimum 15 months on the lees – equating to a non vintage French Champagne Thirdly, <i>Gran Reserva Cava</i> – minimum 30 months ageing on the lees – similar to a Vintage Champagne. (You will note our selection is vintage dated). Fourthly, <i>Cava Paraje Calificado</i> – 36 months on lees, vintage dated, estate bottled from a single vineyard with old established vines.</p> <p><i>What are the "lees" ?</i></p> <p>To make the wine bubbly, Cava (and Champagne) undergoes a second fermentation in the sealed bottle – as a result dissolved CO2 (i.e. carbonation) is trapped in the wine. Enzymes in the inactive yeast cells (<i>the lees</i>) also start to enrich the wine adding all the flavours to the cava- therefore the longer the wine is "on its lees" in the ageing process the more flavour the wine will develop.</p> <p>This Lees ageing is the big USP for Cava over Prosecco which has gas injected into it and which does not have this second bottle fermentation and bottle ageing and gives Cava an ability to rival Champagne in style. The lees are removed by uncorking and recorking the bottle traditionally by the bottle being upside down or the neck frozen to disgorge the sediment at the neck.</p> <p>Of course the great attraction of choosing a quality Cava is that it gives a chance to give everyone a few glasses of decent bubbly without forking out anywhere between £18 to £35 plus for a bottle of NV Champagne – these are normally around £10.00 which isn't bad but with the 25% discount offer at Waitrose come in at around £7.50 which truthfully is astonishing value for a well crafted bubbly.</p> <p>Just as much effort has gone into its production as a typical Champagne using an identical method and for the work involved and quality on offer it is exceptional value. Interestingly, the Perelada example has Cava in great big letters – the Codorniu barely mentions it – to some degree Cava has been the victim of clever promotion and marketing of Prosecco whose success it should equally enjoy given it is really a superior product – and it is true to say it had a bit of "cheap and cheerful" connotation in the past that some producers would prefer to forget – others feel they can be rightly proud of a great quality product that should not be ashamed to go by its name!</p> | Macabeo, Xarello, Parellada | Waitrose £9.78 less 25% £7.33 a bottle (11 bottles) (Codorniu) £10.67 less 25% £8.00 (3 bottles) (Perelada) |

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| White Starter | <p>Chablis “Sainte Celine” 2020 Brocard , Burgundy France There are two styles of Chablis, the oaked version that we associate with rich, Burgundy white wine and the unoaked with crisp minerality and zesty top notes – this is the latter style, so ideal with a seafood starter and will have a lovely long finish – the trademark of a good wine is the longer you can continue to taste it having swallowed it! The secret to its minerality is its limestone soil which is composed of the fossilised remains of sea creatures from a very long time ago. Chablis, although part of Burgundy, is really its own region as it is well to the north west of Dijon. Brocard is highly regarded and reliable and this comes in at a great price on offer for a quality, organic Chablis – there are a number of Chablis that tend to trade on the name of the Appellation but are not necessarily well made or interesting wines.</p> | Chardonnay Unoaked | Waitrose £18.33 less 25% wine offer £13.75 (8 bottles) |
| Red Starter | <p>AOC Moulin a Vent “RocheGRES” Single vineyard 2020 Albert Bichot – Beaujolais (Cru Village) France This is the grandest of the Beaujolais “Cru” villages – that is the villages considered worthy enough to be able to be sold under their own village name rather than simply as a “Beaujolais Villages” - The Moulin a Vent’s wines have the weight and spiciness of the Rhone wines but have almost gamey pinot noir flavours – there is increasing tendency to focus on single vineyard offerings rather than blends of various grapes from the appellation and this is the case here – always a promising indicator of a good quality wine with attention to detail from the grower.</p> <p>Strictly it is a Burgundy wine but it is at some distance to the heart of Burgundy and its granite soils do not let Pinot Noir thrive so here it is all about Gamay – this should be a spot on accompaniment to our Sausage fest with hints of Rhone spiciness and (only) a bit less serious than our Beaune! The vineyard covers 13 acres and the vines are in one of 18 recognised single vineyards. The name means not surprisingly “grey rock” alluding to the granite soil and granite visible in the surface of the soil.</p> <p>This terroir defines the structured, fleshy profile of this wine with floral aromas with ripe cherry, with spice and a touch of oak. The palate is round with elegant tannins. The finish is balanced, fleshy and delicate. The vines are old, 80 to 100 years, grapes handpicked and up to 12 months in oak. A note on Waitrose website suggests that the top quality producer Chateau des Jacques makes the wine with techniques closer to high quality Pinot noir to give a juicy and fruity wine, with floral mineral style rather than some of the rich savouriness of other examples but I can’t see any other reference to this. Either way, a top Beaujolais wine.</p> | Gamay | Waitrose £18.33 less 25% wine offer £13.75 a bottle (6 bottles) |
| Red Starter | <p>AOC Beaujolais – Quincie -Louis Jadot (Cru Village – Beaujolais) 2021 I could only locate 6 bottles of the Moulin a Vent so decided to opt for another quality Cru wine from Beaujolais – we should have cherries and raspberries on a soft, juicy palate – typically for Beaujolais we have granite soil or “pierres bleues” – blue stones and hence Gamay rather than Pinot Noir which is typical for the rest of Burgundy. This is one of the Beaujolais Cru Villages able to have its own name on the label. Louis Jadot is a top Burgundy “négociant” – buying the grapes from smaller growers who haven’t got the economies of scale or resources to produce their own wine – typical for Burgundy.</p> | Gamay | Waitrose £12.83 but less 25% on wine offer £9.62 a bottle (2 bottles) |
| White Main | <p>Penfolds “Max’s” Chardonnay 2019 – Adelaide Hills, Australia The Waitrose offer combined with the generous budget of our Wine Lunch allows us to bring in some premium offerings and Penfolds is one of the world’s top wineries - a magnum (equals two normal size bottles) of 2014 Penfolds Grange Shiraz is £1,080 ! – a magnum of their 2010 Penfolds Kalimna Shiraz from Barossa is £2,802 – and it is great to be able to try (albeit a slightly more humble) example from their stable which shares their winemaking style and philosophy!</p> <p>Penfolds was founded in 1844 by Dr Christopher and Mary Penfold who planted vine cuttings they had carried on their voyage to Australia – Mary became the leading light at the Winery whilst Dr Penfold focused on his growing medical reputation. They produced popular claret style wines and Rieslings and Mary was determined and full of endeavour. Her daughter Georgina took over in 1884 and she continued experimenting with new production methods. By 1907 Penfolds was South Australia’s largest winery and in 1948 it appointed its first “Chief Winemaker”, Max Schubert who propelled Penfolds onto the global stage by</p> | Chardonnay Oaked | Waitrose £18.33- less 25% wine offer so £13.74 a bottle net (4 bottles) |

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| | <p>experimenting with wines with considerable ageing potential – and created “Penfolds Grange” in the 1950s. Needless to say, this wine is named after and as a tribute to Max Schubert. They have an extensive range of very prestigious wines in their line up.</p> <p>I had originally hoped to get 8 bottles of the Savigny-Les-Beaune as an example of an “oaked” Chardonnay but there were only 4 on the shelf so that left me musing as to an alternative premium Chardonnay in similar style to sit alongside the White Burgundy and my eyes spotted Penfolds Max’s which is a quality oaked Chardonnay from a premium house. It was also a little less expensive than the Savigny though which helped with the overall budgeting. We are assured we will still get some bright crisp acidity and background minerality notwithstanding its time in barrel and freshness and fine structure, lemon meringue and citrus/lime notes, Adelaide nectarine aromas with almond nougat from the barrel with some white pepper. Above average rain gave the vines in Adelaide Hills healthy moisture profiles and cool nights and warm days led to an excellent vintage.</p> | | |
| White Main | <p>Savigny-Les- Beaune AOP 2017 Jean Jacques Girard, Burgundy France The vineyards were established by the family in 1529 and have remained in their ownership since then. The vineyard is called “Les Belles Filles” after a local dignitary shocked the village after exclaiming these words at the sight of the nuns from the nearby convent tending the vines! The vineyard is opposite those of Corton Charlemagne (Grand Cru) and Girard’s stable includes a number of top Burgundy whites including Corton Charlemagne and Meursault.</p> <p>Chardonnay is the grape behind all the great white Burgundies and this has oak ageing for about 10 months so we will get golden yellow colour with a nose of citrus but with a woody background giving roundness in the mouth. There is also red Savigny Les Beaune made from Pinot Noir. The village is next to Beaune and Girard is a top producer.</p> | Chardonnay Oaked | Waitrose £27.51 less 25% wine offer £20.63 a bottle (4 bottles) |
| Red Main | <p>Cote de Beaune AOC 2018 Joseph Drouhin Cote d’Or Burgundy, France The handsome budget we achieve with the wine lunch enables us to venture into the territory of fine wines and more particularly the region of Burgundy. “Cote de Beaune” refers to the Southern half of the Cote d’Or of Burgundy, which contains many of the great Burgundy appellations - but it is also a wine appellation in its own right, as in this case which is on the hill overlooking the city of Beaune. (This wine should not be confused with Cote de Beaune-Villages which is blended with grapes from various villages in the wider Cote de Beaune).</p> <p>Drouhin is a top Burgundy grower and négociant (someone who will buy grapes from other, often smaller growers, who are unable to produce wine commercially in their own right, which is a feature of Burgundy, as many of the vineyards are small parcels scattered across various Appellations with few large vineyards under single ownership and therefore a négociant will typically source grapes from various growers in a particular appellation and produce wine under the name of that Appellation- hence why when you buy a bottle of Burgundy wine it may well be labelled Louis Latour, Drouhin or such like with the name of the Appellation, rather than Chateau Winter or similar, as in Bordeaux, as the wine is not produced from one single grower or estate. For this reason the name, knowledge and skill of the producer/négociant is very important in Burgundy and a wine from a top producer of a lesser appellation may well be better than an average producer with a top name appellation).</p> <p>The grapes in this case come from the Drouhin estate on the afore mentioned hill and also include grapes from younger vines of his Clos des Mouches and other Premier Crus of Beaune that have been “declassified” – a “Beaune AOC” wine can be declassified into “Cote de Beaune”.</p> <p>The cultivation follows biodynamic principles – guano (seabird manure) is used as fertilizer. Yields are kept low to improve quality – 20% less than the law permits there. Harvesting is by hand in open crates. The wine is aged in (10% new oak) French oak barrels for 12 to 15 months, Drouhin insisting on controlling the weathering of the wood for 3 years which contributes to the elegance of the wine. The ageing gives complexity and spice.</p> | Pinot Noir | Waitrose £33.92 a bottle less 25% wine offer £25.44 a bottle (8 bottles) |

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| | <p>It hardly needs to be said that the grapes are Pinot Noir which is the stipulation for all Burgundy red wines if they are to be sold under the various Appellation Controlee's of the region. Joseph Drouhin established the House in 1880 at the age of 22 and his son Maurice purchased land in some outstanding appellations such as Clos des Mouches – his grandson Robert acquired many vineyards in Chablis – they have built up 80 hectares of vineyards in Burgundy of which 2/3 are Premier and Grand Cru classified across 90 top appellations in Burgundy giving a wide array of Terroirs (this is something the French obsess about – soil type, drainage, angle to the sun, microclimate, prevailing wind etc that gives each individual vineyard a “sense of place”) with subtle variations.</p> <p>Their list of wines includes 5 Premier Cru Beaune's, 9 different Chablis mainly Premier or Grand Cru, Chambertin, Chassagne and 8 Puligny Montrachet, Gevrey Chambertin, Fixin, Corton Grand Cru, Aloxe Corton, Meursault, 8 Nuits Saint Georges as well as classic Beaujolais – in fact, almost every great Appellation of Burgundy, red and white is represented in their line up whose names will bring a twinkle to the eyes of Wine Discoverers everywhere! Many of these will still be beyond our respectable budget but it is great to be able to bring along to the Group a quality Beaune wine from a top producer -and Beaune is the capital of Burgundy wine standing at the heart of all these prestigious appellations.</p> <p>His four Great Grandchildren now run the Company having grown up in the vineyards – they each have their own role and whilst they perpetuate the family tradition they do not shy away from innovation.</p> <p>The 2018 harvest gave structured reds with a nice grain of tannin, and aromatic with balance of acidity – their website gives an almost daily diary of the changes in the season and activity in the vineyards which I won't bore you with here! A red Burgundy is often the wine recommended to go with Christmas Turkey so it is quite a seasonal choice albeit we have gone “left field” and avoided typical Xmas fare with our Winter warmer! A bit of a Burgundian bargain at £25 a bottle!</p> | | |
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