

Nicely Marked down

This summer I was honoured to be asked by Marks & Spencer to pick out ten of my favourites among their wines and describe them in the glossy Your M&S Magazine. It took a bit of doing, because I had lately tasted more than 100 wines from the enormous M&S range, and there were some I rather minded leaving out.

Now, M&S is back in my mind, as the retail giant has just launched an epic promotion in which all the wines are reduced in price by a quarter for customers who buy any six bottles at a time. Wines I considered good value thus become real bargains, and some wines I thought might be a little bit beyond the budget could now just about come in.

Pineau des Charentes is one of the curiosities of French winemaking. Made under its own appellation contrôlée since 1935, it is the classic aperitif of the town and region of Cognac, made to a simple recipe: two parts fresh grape juice to one of brandy. It can be delicious, a refreshing blend of grapy sweetness with the pungent ardour of the spirit.

The name pineau is a bit of a mystery – no one even in the Cognac trade can explain to me why it is known by a word that translates literally as “pine water”.

The topographical part of the name is simpler: it's the plural ‘des Charentes’ because the grapes and the brandy can come from either (or both) of two distinct producing areas, Charentes, and Charentes-Maritimes.

In the bars of this hospitable region, they serve pineau straight from the fridge. The drink is as clear and bright as wine (or cognac) with colours ranging from a white-wine-like paleness to the copper-gold of the grandest, longest-matured brands. The spirit, or eau-de-vie, used in pineau is young, newly distilled, and consequently colourless.

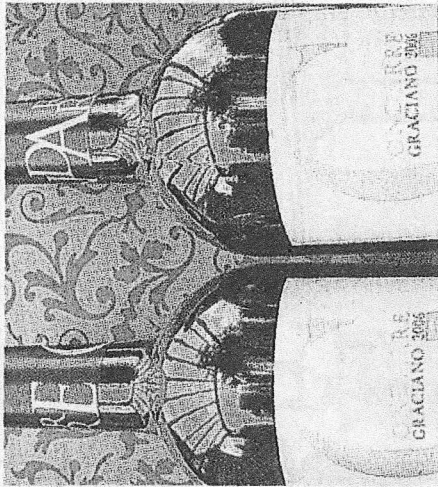
A rare treat

Pineau is regrettably scarce in Britain. None of the supermarkets (not even Waitrose) stocks it, but I am very pleased to have found a good example at Wiltshire wine merchants Yapp Brothers. Domaine de Gadrat Pineau des Charentes Blanc at £11.25 is a delightful introduction to the style, pale gold in colour with an aroma suggesting sweet apples as well as ripe grapes, and a heady ardour – stimulating and reassuring all at once.

I have also tried the longer-aged Gadrat Pineau des Charentes Réserve at £18.50 from Yapps, which is

copper-coloured, silky and finely balanced between fruit and fire – a fabulous aperitif.

Yapp Bros, Mere, Wiltshire. Tel: 01747 860423; website: www.yapp.co.uk.



BRIDGEWATER CHINA

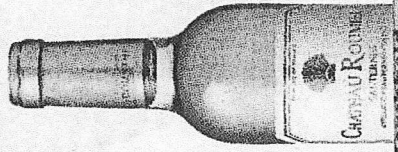
Locally grown in Cheddar

meat from an organic farm in Widcombe

Mendip Moments & Salcombe

Wine of the Week

Château Roumieu Sauternes 2006 halved from £13.99 to £6.99 for a half-bottle at selected Co-op outlets (the biggest ones, in other words), is the sweet-wine bargain of the year. This is “dessert” wine of the very best kind from Bordeaux, gold in colour, ambrosial in its richness, honeyed and succulent and yet perfectly balanced with a fleetingly limey acidity. The Co-op clearly has a good supply of it, as it has been making occasional appearances on the shelves for the last year or more. I have recommended it here before, and on last



tasting produced

Opening Times:

Farm Shop: Monday to Friday 9am - 5:30pm

Saturday 8:30am - 5:30pm

Sunday 10am - 5pm

Tea Rooms: Monday to Saturday 9:30am - 5:30pm

Sunday 10am - 5:30pm

Wheelchair access, children welcome, free parking, coaches by appointment

SHOP: 01761 220067

TEA ROOMS: 01761 220172

