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Hosting This Christmas? A Wine Expert Reveals the 8 Bottles You Need

I'm a Wine Expert: The 8 Wines to Keep on Hand for the Festive Season

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Hosting family and friends over Christmas can be overwhelming. With guests coming and going, endless shopping lists and plenty to organise, choosing the right selection of wines can easily fall to the bottom of the priority list.

But you don't need to spend a fortune on a huge selection of wines to cater for every occasion this Christmas. Instead, it's all about choosing the right styles to complement different meals, suit your guests and ensure you're prepared for whatever the festive season brings.

Michele Longari, Sommelier and purchasing director at Hay Wines, outlines the eight essential wine styles you need for any occasion this Christmas.

The Everyday Fizz: For Unexpected Guests and Informal Celebrations

Examples: Prosecco Extra Dry (Italy), Cava Extra Seco (Spain), Blanquette de Limoux Brut (France)

Whether friends are popping by or you're hosting an impromptu family gathering, an affordable, fruity sparkling wine with a touch of sweetness is ideal for spontaneous festive moments.

Michele adds, “I'd always recommend keeping a bottle chilled in the fridge throughout December, ready for unexpected visitors, spontaneous aperitifs or informal gatherings.”

Affordable option: Waitrose Blueprint Prosecco, Waitrose (£8.50)

Upgrade option: La Piotta MilleBolle Organic Brut, Hay Wines (£13.49)

The Celebratory Sparkling Wine: For the Special Moments

Examples: Champagne Brut, English Sparkling Wine, Franciacorta Brut

There's no need to open your most expensive Champagne every time someone pops round during December. Keep an affordable, crowd-pleasing fizz ready for casual gatherings and save your more complex traditional-method sparkling wines for the celebrations that really matter.

Michele adds: “Excellent traditional-method sparkling wines can be found beyond Champagne. English sparkling wine and Franciacorta, for example, can offer wonderful complexity and elegance, providing exciting alternatives to Champagne.”

Affordable option: Delacourt Brut Champagne, M&S (£25)

Upgrade option: Pol Roger Brut Réserve NV, Independent merchants (£54-£57)

The Fresh, Crisp White Wine: For Seafood and Festive Starters

Examples: Sauvignon Blanc, Albariño, Picpoul de Pinet

Choose a fresh, crisp white wine with vibrant acidity to pair with lighter festive dishes, particularly seafood such as smoked salmon and prawns, canapés and starters. Its refreshing character helps balance richer flavours without overpowering the food.

Michele adds: “This style of white wine is ideal to have chilled and ready for Christmas Eve gatherings, pre-lunch drinks or whenever you're serving lighter bites and seafood.”

Affordable option: Sainsbury’s Taste the Difference Picpoul de Pinet, Sainsbury’s (£10.75)

Upgrade option: Domaine Vacheron Sancerre Blanc, Hennings (£40.50)

The Rich, Elegant White: For Christmas Turkey and More Substantial Dishes

Examples: White Burgundy Chardonnay, premium New World Chardonnay, white Rhône blends

Choose this style for a more structured, refined white wine with greater texture, complexity and weight. Best paired with roast turkey, chicken, creamy sauces, rich side dishes, and more elaborate festive dishes.

Michele adds, "One of the biggest misconceptions about Christmas lunch is that you need a red wine to accompany the turkey. In reality, a well-balanced Chardonnay can be an even better choice, particularly when you're serving rich gravy, creamy sauces

and all the traditional trimmings."

Affordable option: M&S Classics White Burgundy, M&S/Ocado (£12)

Upgrade option: Kumeu River Estate Chardonnay 2024, Hay Wines (£30.99)

The Light, Elegant Red: For Turkey, Lighter Roasts and Versatility

Examples: Pinot Noir, Beaujolais Cru, elegant Etna Rosso

This style of red wine is refined, approachable, with bright acidity, delicate tannins, and plenty of elegance. A light red is another excellent choice to pair with turkey, roast chicken, mushroom dishes, and any Christmas leftovers.

Michele adds, “a red wine doesn’t have to be big and powerful to complement a festive meal. Sometimes elegance and freshness are far more important.”

Affordable option: Waitrose No.1 Beaujolais Villages, Waitrose (£14.75)

Upgrade option: Simpsons Rabbit Hole Pinot Noir 2024, The Wine Society (£29)

The Bold, Structured Red: For Hearty Roasts and Richer Dishes

Examples: Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Rioja Reserva

Look for a full-bodied red with plenty of depth and character, offering enough structure to stand up to hearty festive dishes such as roast beef, lamb and rich gravies.

Michele adds, “This is the bottle to bring out when the occasion calls for something a little more special, particularly alongside richer festive dishes that benefit from a wine with greater depth and complexity.”

Affordable option: Trivento Réserve Malbec, Sainsbury’s (£9)

Upgrade option: Bodegas Muga Rioja Reserva 2022, Christopher Piper Wines (£24.10)

The Dessert Wine: For Christmas Pudding, Mince Pies and Festive Treats

Examples: Pedro Ximénez Sherry, Rutherglen Muscat, Banyuls

A dessert wine is an intensely flavoured sweet wine capable of standing up to the richness of dried fruit and spices found in traditional Christmas desserts.

Michele adds: “One thing to remember is that your dessert wine should be at least as sweet as the dessert itself. Otherwise, the wine can taste surprisingly dry or unbalanced when paired together.”

Affordable option: Campbell’s Rutherglen Muscat 37.5cl, Waitrose (£15.25)

Upgrade option: Maculan Torcolato 37.5cl, Hay Wines (£32.49)

The Fortified Wine: For the Cheeseboard and After-Dinner Relaxation

Examples: 10-Year-Old Tawny Port, Late Bottled Vintage Port, Cream Sherry

A great choice for enjoying a rich, warming drink towards the end of the meal, whether paired with a cheeseboard or simply sipped as a relaxing after-dinner drink.

Michele adds: "My personal recommendation would be an aged Tawny Port, such as a 10-Year-Old. Not only is it a traditional part of a British Christmas, but it's also incredibly versatile and, once opened, can remain enjoyable for considerably longer than most standard table wines."

Affordable option: M&S Classics No.41 Finest Reserve Port, M&S/Ocado (£13)

Upgrade option: Quinta do Noval 10-Year-Old Tawny Port, Sandhams Wine Merchants (£28.49)

Michele, Sommelier and purchasing director at Hay Wines, concludes,

“Christmas is already an expensive time of year, and there can be a lot of pressure to be the perfect host. However, I think you can entertain confidently without overspending. You don't necessarily need all eight styles of wine; instead, think of this as a selection of options that you can pick and choose from, depending on the occasions you're planning for.

“The secret to choosing wine for Christmas isn't about buying more bottles. It's about making sure every bottle has a purpose. With the right selection, you can be prepared for almost anything the festive season throws at you.”