

September 11 2010 wine

All eyes are on the vineyards in France, nowhere more than in Bordeaux. At this time of the year the weather and the seasonal food is changing. The nights are drawing in and it's time for red wine to go with autumnal food. Partridge, grouse, wild duck, and in France sanglier, the wild boar come into season. Lamb from salt marshes and highest mountains is becoming well mature and has a distinct complexity.

The personification of a food wine for the British has always been claret, red wine from Bordeaux. It is a wonderfully savoury wine with balance of mature fruit, wild herbs, oak and tannin that develops as it ages. It is in total harmony with food of the autumn. Aromas of wild mushrooms and wild berries, a stubble field and bramble can be found in many of the wines.

Some excellent wines at decent prices come from north of the Gironde estuary. Illustrious wines of Pomerol and St Emilion are as expensive as their counterparts in the Medoc, but look a little further and some great stuff can be found. They are mainly from the merlot grape with plenty of ripe fruit and perhaps less tough than wines from cabernet sauvignon.

As a base claret the varietal Merlot from Marks and Spencer is made for them by the renowned company Maison Sichel. The vineyards overlook the Garonne river, and Yvonne Mayer makes the wine for pure flavour and easy drinking.

St Emilion is a well known name, soft and supple merlot wines. The outer areas have suffixes on their names such as Montagne, Puissguin and Lussac St Emilion. They might be 'house wine in a pub' price, but make excellent drinking at home for the same money. Chateau de Lussac blends a fifth of cabernet franc grapes that gives a great firm style to the wine.

East of St Emilion is the area of Cotes de Castillon on the beautiful Dordogne. A favourite since my days as a restaurateur is Chateau de Pitray, a ripe and satisfying wine with aromas and taste that epitomise the wonderful Dordogne and its rich and succulent foods. Find some autumn food, but one of these and all the flavours of the season will come together.

Bordeaux Merlot, Marks and Spencer £6.29

Chateau de Pitray, Cotes de Castillon, 2006 £8.99

Chateau de Lussac, Lussac St Emilion 2002 £14.24