

FESTIVE TIPPLES

Wine expert Michael Denton from Decanter on his top picks for Christmas



Domaine Rolly Gassmann



Château Biac



There is no better reason than Christmas to open that fine bottle of bubbly, and for those who celebrate in style, Champagne is

surely the most evocative. One of my favourites is Champagne Charles Heidsieck, Brut, Vintage 2012 from the Ultimate Collection. Charles is the smallest but the best of the three Champagne houses named Heidsieck. Established in 1851 by the nephew of Piper-Heidsieck's owner, Charles Heidsieck himself was the original 'Champagne Charlie'. Charles Heidsieck Brut Millésimé 2012 is a blend of ten Grands Crus and Premiers Crus meticulously selected by the House, expressing magnificent minerality, intensity and acidity. (£95, Millesima)

Created in 2005, another favourite of mine is Champagne Barons de Rothschild, born from an alliance between the three branches of the Rothschild family. Try the Concordia Brut NV. (£56 thefinestbubble.com). If you are on a budget, Waitrose Champagne Brut NV is an excellent choice. It comes from the prestigious house of Maison Bonnet. Using only the top cuvée made from the first pressing of grapes, it has a medium body and a lovely citrus fruit with gentle toasty notes. (£24.99)

I recently came across a beautiful rosé from Côtes de Provence, Château Sainte Marguerite Crus Classés Rosé 2023, "Les Fantastiques" cuvée, which has a superb balance and structure with finesse, freshness and a peachy, apricot aroma. It is great to

accompany seafood such as lobster, scallops or crayfish. (£29.54 Vinatis)

Another rosé from Provence that I discovered recently at the Decanter Fine Wine Encounter tasting in Singapore was the delicious Minuty Château Minuty 281, Provence Rosé 2023, made from 90% Grenache, 5% Rolle, and 5% Syrah grapes. The nose showed an exotic fruit and was delicate and fresh on the palate with a good length of flavour. It will go well with beautiful seafood. (£46.60 Vinatis)

My favourite Christmas red wine from Bordeaux is Château La Conseillante Pomerol 2015, made from 82% Merlot and 18% Cabernet Franc. It is a classic wine showing a rich and ripe red berry fruit with very soft and elegant tannins and fresh mint and char-grilled oak. Well-balanced and complex raspberry fruit with a long finish. It will go well with Christmas dinner and firm and cured cheeses. (£140 from Bordeaux specialists such as Berry Bros & Rudd and The Wine Society)

Another great wine from Bordeaux, this time from the left bank in Pauillac is Château Pichon Baron, Les Griffons de Pichon Baron, Pauillac 2019 made from 59% Merlot, 41% Cabernet Sauvignon. It shows a blackcurrant ripe fruit with lovely silky tannins. (£31, Grapey or Justerini and Brooks)

For value Bordeaux try the Cru Bourgeois from Barton & Guestier, Château Magnol, Haut-Médoc, 2021. This wine

shows a deep purple blackcurrant fruit with good depth of flavour, soft tannins and long finish. (£20.91, Vinatis). For the cheese course, I would like to suggest an Alsace from my best producer, Domaine Rolly Gassmann, Gewurztraminer 2019, with a pale golden colour, concentrated aromas of jasmine and lychee, complemented by well-balanced acidity with a lingering floral and fruity finish. It goes well with blue and creamy cheeses. (£30, Berry Bros & Rudd)

On a sweet note to end the meal, I always have a special place for The Secret du Château Biac 2015 made from 6% Sauvignon and 94% Semillon grapes chosen meticulously one by one in several passages once Noble Rot, Botrytis Cinerea, has set in. The exotic aromas of peaches, apricots, mango and lychee will combine to a long elegant finish. (£35.95 per 50cl bottle, Brompton Wine) 🍷

