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TIMES ONLINE



“Any sort of product begins to look more attractive if it is sold as an alternative to Gordon Brown” Daniel Finkelstein

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Times Online

From **The Times**

February 20, 2010

Wine: Golden burgundy is the '08 miracle

Critics of this troubled vintage were far too hasty



Jane MacQuitty

RECOMMEND?

Writing off any vintage before the wine has finished fermenting is a big mistake. So, *nul points* to those writers and merchants who dismissed the 2008 burgundy vintage last year. Far from being a titanic disaster, Burgundy's aptly titled Côte d'Or, or golden slope, has produced tiny quantities of sensationally good, steely, citrusy, minerally '08 whites and some surprisingly succulent, delicate, yet vibrant, raspberry-perfumed reds — flavours that burgundy hunters pay stratospheric sums for every year.

Broaching this unexpectedly enticing burgundy vintage somewhere between five and eight years of age should be about right. Perfect for impatient, contemporary drinkers without cellars.

To be fair to its many critics, 2008 burgundy had a dire growing season. Just like Britain's rained-off '08 summer, it was unseasonably cold and damp most of the time, leading to a small fruit set and rampant rot and mildew in the vineyards, and unripe green grapes everywhere.

By August, Burgundy's growers were convinced that '08 would be a catastrophe, but then a miracle happened in the form of an Indian summer of good weather and a drying north wind. The

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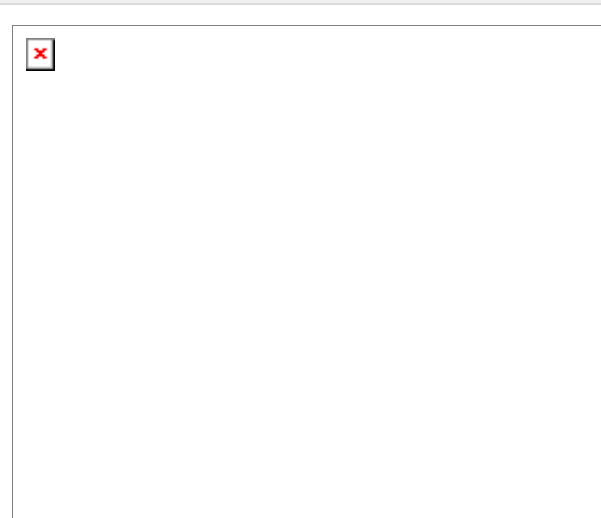


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grapes finally ripened through desiccation, not sunshine.

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All this led to some strange goings-on in the vineyards and cellars. Vigilant growers not only had to spray twice as often in their vineyards as usual but also had to pick out the rotten and unripe grapes many times, reducing their already small yields still further.

With such high levels of malic acid and much of the natural yeast on the grape skins washed off by rain, an astonishingly long, slow fermentation took place. Many of the '08 wines tasted unpleasantly tart sampled direct from barrel, hence burgundy '08's bad initial press.

Inconsistency is a characteristic of the 2008 vintage. Understandably, there are lots of disappointing wines from growers who struggled and from Burgundy vineyards for which Nature saved her worst. Yet for those of you who want a surprisingly good vintage that is going to mature faster than either of its celebrated superiors, '05 and '06, I'd say that the '08s were tailor-made for you. E-mail me for my list of '08 grand burgundy buys and '08 best buys from tried and trusted merchants.

This week's best buys

2009 Balbi Pinot Grigio, Tulum Valley, Argentina Marks & Spencer, down to £4.99 until February 28 My kind of winter white, stacked with sunny, zesty, citrus and peach fruit; at last a pinot gris with personality.

2009 Fairhills Semillon-Sauvignon, Western Cape Tesco, down to £4.49 until Tuesday, then £5.99 Fairtrade fortnight looms, so do the right thing and snap up this ripe, verdant, spicy, zippy, Cape white.

2009 Balbi Shiraz- Viognier, Tulum Valley, Argentina Marks & Spencer down to £4.99 until February 28 Lap up this big, fat, plummy Rhône-apeing New World red for a treat on a cold night .

2008 Fairhills Malbec- Syrah-Tempranillo, Argentina Tesco, down to £4.99 until Tuesday, then £6.12 Mix and match your Fairtrade choices with this tasty, curranty malbec blend.

The keeper

2007 Montessu, Isola dei Nuraghi, Agricola Punica, Sardinia, Italy Armit (020-7908 0660), £15.90 Sardinia can make great red wine, especially from the carignan grape grown in the southwest of the island, just like this one, topped up with a 10 per cent dollop each of the Rhône's syrah and Bordeaux's merlot and two cabernets. What you get is an elegant red, aged for well over a year in French oak barriques, with fine, juicy, herby, red fruit flavours. Give it a few more years in the cellar and it will evolve into a gamey, spicy, mouthful. Drink now until 2015.

jane.macquitty@thetimes.co.uk



Top wine tips from Jane MacQuitty

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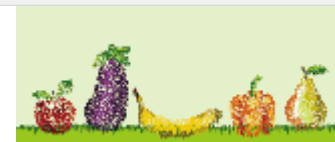
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Jane MacQuitty

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