

30 WINES TO WARM UP YOUR WINTER

As the nights draw in, we reach for palate-enveloping warmers – whether chunky and spicy, or joyfully unctuous – to enjoy around the winter table, or in an armchair by the fire. Here's a selection to suit all palates and budgets

WORDS & SELECTION OLLY SMITH

The classic idea of a winter warmer is a red with generous booze to give your internal thermometer a comforting upward nudge. Grapes with a naturally spicy character such as Zinfandel, Syrah and Carménère often get the nod. But I've also included some oak-amplified classics along with robust southern French blends, the odd white with a fleck of powerful oak, a white Châteaufort-du-Pape that should come with the offer of free glue on the label such is its deliciousness, as well as plenty of bottles from warmer climes that possess exuberance and generosity in equal measure.

I've also included a few bottles that perhaps aren't what would be traditionally thought of as winter warmers, such as Tim Wildman's Astra Barry, which is an orange-hued pét-nat wine from Australia. Partly I thought a fizz might be fun; I also happen to love the wine for its outrageously characterful dynamism – ever tasted a sparkling blend of Zibibbo, Fiano, Arneis, Nero d'Avola and Mataro before? Me neither – and its gingery twinkle is the ultimate ignition to spark your refreshment rockets on even the frostiest day.

Tavel Rosé is another one-off inclusion from the pink department. With a more robust style and great with food, I reach for it when the weather is crisp and adore its festive berry hue, too. I've even



got here a French white Riesling blend, at just 9.5% alcohol, which has a brightness designed to lift any darkling day. And, of course, I wanted to include a range of production methods from riposo to extended maturation, bottle age to rampaging levels of youthful fruit. And the prices vary, too, from £7 to just shy of a hundred quid. Something, I hope, for everyone.

INSULATION FOR THE SOUL

With the exception of a stonking-value Pedro Ximénez, I've skipped fortified wines. Of course I'm a fan of Port, Sherry and Madeira (see 'Expert's choice', p.44), and they unquestionably deserve all the praise the wine world can give them.

I did also think about sweet wines and stuck in an epic icon – who wouldn't want to sip a glass of Vin de Constance when the weather's impertinent inclemency can feel so unrelenting? Sweeter than the second coming of Elvis himself and just as memorable, it's the kind of wine that we all ought to gather round this year and merely marvel at, such is its beauty. A light in these daily times, and a reminder that wine is so much more than grapes. It's the liquid that speaks to us in universal ways and I'm increasingly wondering whether only music can ever come quite as close.

In the northern hemisphere as we go to press, this year's juice is making its way towards becoming wine. In the southern hemisphere, this year's buds are beginning to think about becoming next year's grapes. Wine never stands still; wine flows; even when it quietly moves through the stillness of a cellar, you can always catch it in a fresh context, an iteration to beguile, impress, disappoint or bemuse.

Food pairing is one such angle, and I've included a few suggestions with some of these recommendations. But the principal variable is, of course, you.

These 30 choices will warm you in their various ways this winter, and how you choose to enjoy them depends on your internal weathervane as much as the

of bottles from warmer climes that possess exuberance and generosity in equal measure.

I've also included a few bottles that perhaps aren't what would be traditionally thought of as winter warmers, such as Tim Wildman's Astro Bunny, which is an orange-hued pét-nat wine from Australia. Partly I thought a fizz might be fun; I also happen to love the wine for its outrageously characterful dynamism – ever tasted a sparkling blend of Zibibbo, Fiano, Arneis, Nero d'Avola and Mataro before? Me neither – and its gingery twinkle is the ultimate ignition to spark your refreshment rockets on even the frostiest day.

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Olly Smith's top 30 winter warmers

1. Tim Widdrigan, Astro Barry Pet-Nat Brut, South Australia 2021 90
£26-£27.50 *Bottle Apocrita, Cave Bristol, Clayton Craft, Highway Winery, Joked Wines, Love Wine, Shop Cuvée*

The only fizz I am including as a 'winter warmer' for its mellowish gingery spice, this wine may give the impression of carefree joy, but it's actually an immaculately considered and creative blend of 30% old-vine Zibibbo (with 24 hours' skin contact), 26% Flans, 24% Arneis, 17% Nero d'Avola and 3% Marsano. Aside from wearing the most striking label ever (I'm a fan), this handsome froth delivers a world of apricot, peach and mango magic. It was bottled at 17g/L residual sugar and then fermented to dry, with zero sulphur additions. Gently tip the bottle to allow the sediment to roll into the mix for maximum delectableness and then pop the crown cap carefully - it's a foaming flashback to instant summer and a liquid festival of a wine. **Drink 2022-2023** Alcohol 12%

2. Domaine du Père Caboché, Blanc, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Rhône, France 2021 92
£27 *Top Box*

If ever you needed a reminder of summer's full flush to cheer you through the teeth of winter, this should be top of your list. With beautifully exotic aromas, from peach to hints of pineapple and dried mango, the fruit soars thanks to zero oak and no malolactic fermentation in a bid to preserve tension, vitality and freshness. 40% Clairette, 30% Bourboulenc and 15% each of Roussanne and Grenache Blanc. Voluptuous texture with acres of apricot flavour and flourishing gingery spice trailing through the finish. Pair it with a mountain cheese such as Beaufort or Comté, or try it with coronation chicken. Take it out of the fridge and decant for at least half an hour before serving in order to allow its full complexity to unfold. **Drink 2022-2024** Alc 13.5%

3. Pegasus Bay, Chardonnay, Waipara Valley, Canterbury, New Zealand 2018 92
£29.75 *Field & Flower, K&M, Pure Wines, Ruffles, W. Andrews Wine Co, Vinum, Wine Direct*
Beautifully integrated struck match and roasted pine nut aromas, pumice too.

Minerally as well as oaky, a wine crafted from a large proportion of ungrafted vines, praise to the impeccably judged barrel treatment with the faintest scent of sweet coffee as an extra background echo. It's rich and has lots of tamed citrus verve wrapped in a rich cocoon of oaky softness. The non-clarified juice is fermented in oak puncheons, 70% of them old to limit transference of oaky flavour. A dreamy pairing for creamy recipes or even a simple quiche. With warmth coming from oak spice and ripe fruit, this is a very classy wine with enduring freshness on the finish. **Vitality! Drink 2022-2023** Alc 14%

4. Yalumba, Y Series Viognier, South Australia 2021 90

£8.50-£11.95 *Co-op, Majestic, Mundus Fine Wines, Sainsbury's, Vinum, Wine Direct*
I'm impressed by this wine: it is a better for the cash, from the masters of Viognier Down Under. It's got all the peach-skin and honeysuckle fragrance required and much more. Silkiness gives it a real sense of banking back to summer days, and in the teeth of winter it's exactly what I want in my glass to sip with a gentle, spicy Thai recipe. It's also fantastic with seasonal roasted veg. A wild-ferment wine with a certain apricot vitality, it's by no means warming in the sense of feeling like you've just embraced a radiator, but as the harbinger of heady

summer scents, it'll give your mind a welcome reminder of fruit in sunbeams. **Drink 2022-2023** Alc 13.5%

5. Cramele Recan, The Wine Atlas Fetească Regală, Banat, Romania NV 89

£5 *Atala*
I'm including this Romanian white for several reasons. First, it is astonishingly good value for a crowd-pleasing party white. Without doubt its exotic tropical bloom is a cue for sunnier days to spill around the fountain of memory. And it shows the potential for Romania and its local grapes. It's one to keep in the fridge for when the Christmas carol singers swing by - pour in liberal quantities with snacks. And if you've any coronation chicken knocking around, this bargain scented white makes a delightful pairing. **Drink 2022-2023** Alc 11.5%

6. Domaine Tariquet, Imprévu, Southwest France 2021 89

£9.50 *The Wine Society*
A 9.5% wine as a 'winter warmer'? Really? Well, yes. Mainly because it is a 9.5% wine and such a fruity turbo-charged zinger. It's like switching the headlights on full beam through a citrus frost. There is simply nothing else like it in the whole of France: 66% Riesling with 34% Ugni



Olly Smith's top 30

1. **Tim Wildman, Astro Bunny Pét-Nat Brut, South Australia 2021** 90

£26-£27.50 Bottle Apostle, Cave Bristol, Clapton Craft, Highbury Vintners, Juiced Wines, Love Wine, Shop Cuvée

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Alcohol 12%

2. **Domaine du Père Caboche, Blanc, Châteauneuf-du-Pape,**

2021 92

Minerally as well as from a large proportion of grapevines, praise to the impeccable treatment with the coffee as an extra touch and has lots of tannin in a rich cocoon of non-clarified juice punches, 70% of transference of oak pairing for creamy quiche. With warm spice and ripe fruit with enduring freshness. **Vitality! Drink** 2022

4. **Yalumba, Y S South Australia**

£8.50-£11.95 Co-op Wines, Sainsbury's, V I'm impressed by the cash, from the Down Under. It's honeysuckle fragrance more. Silkiness g harking back to teeth of winter in glass to sip with