



BOB TYRER ON THE BOTTLE

The deputy editor and I were enjoying a glass of The Sunday Times Wine Club champagne late one Saturday evening. It's gentle stuff, good for sloughing off the cares of the week while reading the first editions of rival newspapers. But like all champagne, it costs a fair bit (£24.99). We talked about tastes in wine. He's a claret man; I'll try any wine, but I prefer something that has been made with love and craftsmanship, and to drink it with food. "If I gave you £20," he said, "what would you buy to drink here now?"

"What, without food? Probably a budget champagne." I was thinking of something like the fresh and lively Marc Chauvet Brut Tradition (£19.99; therealwineco.co.uk). "Or I'd go down to Tesco and get a cool-climate Chilean sauvignon blanc, but that wouldn't cost £20." (Maycas del Limari Sauvignon Blanc 2010, £9.99.)

None of this sounded very original, but I find that wine costing £20 is usually such a step up in quality from cheaper swiggers that it screams for food to draw out its subtleties or soften its intensity. Of course, there are overpriced NZ sauvignon blancs in that bracket that would make nice sippers, but why pay the label premium?

What I needed for my £20 was a wine with lowish tannins, a nice bit of acidity and intriguing flavours that come and go in the glass. The first stop had to be Germany, classically the home of sipping whites. The Germans tend nowadays to pack power into wines that are brilliant with a hunk of black bread and a dollop of liver sausage, but a bit tough on the teeth on their own. I found a famous name that used to epitomise bad German wine — sugary and vapid — that has been transformed by new owners, at under £20.

Second, to the eastern foothills of the Pyrenees, where a new focus of French perfectionism has sprung up over the past 20 years, and a white wine that variously tastes of stone, herbs, quince, honey, pears and mangoes as one journeys down the bottle.

And third, to the cool Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia, where Brian Croser, one of Australia's greatest wine visionaries, planted pinot noir eight years ago and has conjured Burgundian subtlety from the young vines. It's worth the £20-plus premium.

LIQUID HUNCHES

★ **Königin Victoriaberg Rheingau Riesling Trocken Joachim Flick 2010 (£16.99)**

Nectarines and a slash of acidity (thewineryuk.com).

★ **Le Soula Blanc Vin de Pays des Côtes Catalanes 2006 (£19.99)** A haunting beauty (Majestic).

★ **Tapanappa Pinot Noir Foggy Hill Vineyard 2008 (£27.21)** Wreathed in spices, smoke and gentle fruit (everywine.co.uk).

What are you drinking? Tell me at wine@sunday-times.co.uk

