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Is any wine worth £2,736?

HOW much would you pay for a bottle of wine?

Prices have been steadily rising in recent years – not least due to taxation – and so has UK demand for wines over £10.

While our tastes would appear to be more refined – or at least willingness to splash out has increased – there's an upper tier of wine that remains the preserve of the mega-rich.

For the last few years I've been checking out one of Britain's top wine auctions – in the rural Welsh setting of Abergavenny.

Until recently, bargains were plentiful for people who knew what to look for at J Straker and Chadwick but there's a suspicion word's got out.

At their last auction, I saw three bottles of Chateau Lafite Rothschild 1982 sell for £5,800. Yet the buyers may well feel they picked up a bargain.

According to a leading wine price comparison website, that iconic vintage from one of Bordeaux's greatest producers is selling for an average £2,736 a bottle – before tax. Its price at the time of release to the market was 225 francs (22.5 euros). Sadly, I'm not in a position to report on its taste however I, like most people, would be left wondering how a wine could ever be worth that sort of money? Yet that is the price people are willing to pay and for football stars, movie moguls and oligarchs £4,800 would be small change.

The Lafite 1982 is by no means the world's most expensive wine with some of the great red (and white) Burgundies plus a few German rieslings taking top honours. Also on the billionaire wine rack sits Pétus, made almost entirely from merlot grapes in Pomerol, near Bordeaux. Pétus is owned by JP Moueix, under the leadership of Christian Moueix. Pétus has also



ON WINE

eluded my clutches however top independent wine merchant Tamers is selling a generic 2009 Pomerol under the Christian Moueix label. Predictably, it's not cheap – £19.50 a bottle – yet neither is it outstanding. It is rich and concentrated with juicy aromas and flavours of plum with hints of spice, cherry and blackcurrant. It's good but there's much better around for the price.

● AS a frequent visitor to Italy, I thought I knew quite a lot about the country's wine.

But the world's second largest producer is arguably the most varied and never fails to throw up a surprise or two. That's unsurprising given Italy has around 350 'authorised' grape varieties used to produce nearly 5 million tonnes of wine every year.

As well as the ubiquitous international grapes like cabernet sauvignon, syrah, merlot, chardonnay and sauvignon blanc, Italy has its own classic 'fine wine' varieties including Tuscany's sangiovese and Barolo's nebbiolo. Then there's pinot grigio.

But, not for the first time, I recently sampled an excellent Italian red from a grape I'd never heard of – Wildbacher.

It's an ancient Austrian variety that's also grown in north-west Italy's Veneto region. I was lucky

enough to try Collalto Wildbacher Colli Trevigiani during a trip last week to the Dolomite ski resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo. The wine's red berry and herbaceous character fooled me into thinking it was a pinot noir. Wrong (again) – but it wasn't a million miles off in style and flavour.

Veneto is the home of scave and prosecco – yet produces more red than white and I was served a couple of outstanding local cabernet sauvignons. At a special wine tasting evening we also sampled a superb soave made by the highly-rated Tamellini brothers. Their Soave 2012, which is available online in the UK for around £10, is richer than many wines from the area with a highly fragrant nose of honeysuckle, peach and citrus.

Also served up was Bosco di Gica Valdobbiadene Prosecco Superiore 2010. Available online at little over a tenner, it's a wonderful example of a rich, full-flavoured prosecco with honeyed flavours of peach, citrus and apple.

Finally, to Italy's most celebrated sparkling wine region and one of its best producers, Ca' del Bosco Franciacorta Cuvee Prestige is made mainly from chardonnay and pinot noir and is a rich, crisp Champagne-like bubbly priced at upwards of £25 online.

