

Coming of age

It's not just expensive wines that benefit from having a lie down. **Tim Atkin** picks four reasonable reds for rookie collectors



Heaven knows who came up with the statistic, but the word in the booze business is that 9 out of 10 wines are drunk within 48 hours of

purchase. Do people in white coats stand, clipboard primed, beside the nation's bottle banks, quizzing punters about when and where they bought their Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay or Shiraz? Or are we such a bunch of lushes that the idea of leaving a bottle in the fridge or a wine rack for more than two days gives us the shakes?

Whatever the answer, the figure sounds plausible enough to me. Keeping wine, let alone laying it down to mature and develop in bottle, is increasingly rare. Patience is something that most of us have run out of. As Richard E Grant says in *Withnail & I*: "We want the finest wines available to humanity, we want them here and we want them now."

In one sense, this is perfectly understandable. The overwhelming majority of modern wine is made to be quaffed in its infancy. The trend towards immediacy started in the New World, particularly Australia, but it has spread across the globe. Even Bordeaux, the area that produces the most age-worthy wines, has changed its style since 1982. Tannic reds that used to take 20 years to soften are now approachable within five.

These days, fewer and fewer wines are



worth ageing, for the simple reason that they won't develop added depth and complexity with time. They are as good in the first five years of their lives as they will ever be. If you doubt this, have a look at the shelves of your local supermarket or off-licence. How many of them, apart from the odd Port or Vintage Champagne, were made before 2004?

I used to be a paid-up member of the DIY (Drink It Young) club, but I've changed my mind since I've had a decent cellar of my own. Keeping wine is always a risk – leave it too long and it'll turn into a shagged-out disappointment – but when you drink something with the right amount of bottle age, it can be truly delicious. I'm always coming across forgotten wines that I didn't

expect to have matured so interestingly.

There are two misconceptions about storing wine. The first is that you need a huge cellar festooned with cobwebs to do so; the second is that only really expensive wines are worth keeping. A wine rack at the back of a cupboard (provided it isn't next to a central heating pipe) is all you need to get going, although you may want to invest in a EuroCave (www.eurocave.co.uk) or even a Spiral Cellar (www.spiralcellars.co.uk) in due course. And if you're prepared to buy a handful of bottles between £8 and £25, you can call yourself a wine collector.

What should you buy? It's really up to you, but I would avoid whites (with the exception of fizz, Riesling, Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay) and lighter reds and concentrate on wines with structure and depth of flavour. One further tip is to purchase something that tastes good now, but which hints at riches to come. If it seems a little firm or oaky, but has plenty of fruit, you're in business.

To simplify things, I've picked four red wines with ageing potential: the dense, chocolatey **2007 De Martino 347 Vineyards Carmenère Reserva** (£7.49, or £5.99 each for two, 13.5%, Majestic); the austere, yet beautifully balanced **2006 Château d'Aydie, Madiran** (£11.99, 13.6%, Waitrose); the bold, voluptuous **2006 Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gonnard Frères** (£18.99, 14.5%, selected branches of Tesco) and the savoury, restrained **2004 Contino Rioja Reserva** (£22, 14%, Marks & Spencer).

How long should you keep them? It depends on you, but why not buy three bottles of the same wine? Drink one within 48 hours, one in two years' time and one in five. It may just change the way you drink and enjoy wine. ★

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Ask Tim

Q What is your opinion of dry white Tokaji Furmint, which I have only ever found in Hungary, and loved. Can you recommend anywhere to buy it in the UK? Is it something that rapidly loses its appeal when drunk in Bradford rather than Budapest? **Andy Bryan**

A Dry Tokaji is produced in much greater quantities than the sweet stuff, but rarely leaves Hungary. It used to be regarded as a vastly inferior wine, with high acidity and not much else to recommend it, but in the last decade or so, producers such as Disznóko and Oremus, both of them owned by non-Hungarian companies, have done a great job, making wines with greater concentration and depth of flavour. The 2007 Disznóko Dry Furmint (£9.99, 14%,

Waitrose) and the 2005 Oremus Mandolas Dry Furmint (£15.50, 13%, The Cellar Society, 020 8453 7141) are both great.

Q We were in Crete recently and drank lots of delicious, light, low-alcohol red wine which didn't leave us feeling as if we'd been hit over the head with a hammer. Can you get wine like that here? **Adam Nicolson**

A It's not easy to find wines from Crete in the UK and sadly, the island's best producer, Lyrarakis, is not available here. Bibendum imports wines from Crete Olympias and has the 2007 Silenus Kotsifale/Syrah (£6.83, 12.5%, 020 7449 4120), which will meet your requirements.

If you have a wine question for Tim, email ask.tim@observer.co.uk

Buy of the week



2007 Darting Estate Weissburgunder Eiswein, Pfalz
£14.99 per half, 9%, Marks & Spencer

Made from frozen Pinot Blanc grapes picked in December, this is very exotic, super sweet but absolutely delicious with a tropical fruit salad