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THE TIMES

WEEKEND

The best new organic wines

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Organic wines were back in the headlines this month after a study found that they scored higher than their non-organic counterparts in three of the world's best wine-rating magazines. This proved, it was said, that organic practices improved the flavour of grapes and gave a truer representation of *terroir*.

I'm all for healthy living and saving the planet but what I have found by tasting hundreds of organic bottles is that these wines are still evolving and are often overpriced. The off, oxidised brutes of the 1980s are gone, but lots of dull organic wines still remain.

Pierpaolo Petrassi, the head wine buyer at Waitrose, agrees: "Organic wines don't have a 100 per cent strike rate." Waitrose carries 63 organic wines, compared with 8 at M&S and 7 at Sainsbury's, so he should know.

The big rub is the claim that organic wines are free from chemical herbicides, fungicides, pesticides and fertilisers. In practice, bordeaux mixture, aka copper sulphate, and sulphur are often used, sometimes in greater quantities than in standard wine production.

Nicolas Potel, from the leading burgundy estate Domaine de Bellene, was so incensed by a government edict a few years back forcing organic wine producers to use inorganic pesticides against golden rot that he surrendered his eco-certification. Even so, like other vigneron, Potel feels that organic wine methods produce "more aromatic, intense whites, and reds with better tannic structure".

Given that it's easier to produce organic wines in hot, dry, windy vineyards than in damp northern climes, it's a surprise to learn that 90 per cent of the globe's total are European, led by Spain. The early Noughties boom in organic plantings has slowed, but there is a much wider and tastier range available, with lots of new world offerings too. Vintage Roots (01189 326 566), which specialises in organics, has more than 350 listed, and the star, given how tricky organic fizz

is to produce, is the light, tongue-tingling apple and lemon-edged Il Grillo di Santa Tresa Vino Spumante Brut, a £12.75 Italian triumph. Spend half that on a terrific duo from Chile's Santa Emiliana, either the buttered, banana 2015 Silbador Organic Chardonnay, or juicy, dusky plum-stashed 2015 Silbador Merlot, both £6.50 (Wine Society, 01438 741177). Don't miss Waitrose's gorgeous, creamy, black cherry-ripe, Australian 2015 Hedonist Shiraz either (£13.99), or the stunning, gutsy, cinnamon-scented red 2013 Font de Michelle, Châteauneuf-du-Pape (£25.99, and worth every penny). *This week's best buys* 2015 Sauvignon Blanc *La Boucaude*, Bordeaux, France, 12.5 per cent *Lidl*, £5.99 Dry white bordeaux is a class act, and even this bargain basement, greengage and lime zest spiked 2015 is a gem. 2014 Norton Winemaker's Reserve Malbec, Argentina, 13.5 per cent *Waitrose*, £8.99, down from £11.99 Old vine malbec from a cool, high vineyard, all tobacco, mocha and black moscatel raisin fruit. 2015 Cimarosa Carmenere Reserva Privada, Chile, 13.5 per cent *Lidl*, £6.99 *Lidl*'s Cimarosa new world wines are improving, so nab this raspberry and redcurrant-stashed herb-finished Chilean. 2015 Acustic Blanc, Spain, 14 per cent *Lea & Sandeman* (020 7244 0522), £13.95, down from £15.75 Pep yourself up with this nutty, fennel leaf and citrus winter white charmer, mostly grenache with a dollop of macabeo. 2015 Markus Huber Grüner Veltliner, Austria, 12.5 per cent *Waitrose*, £7.99, down from £10.79 A delicious, zesty, white pepper and dill-scented, unoaked grüner from 30-year-old vines — hence its extra verve. 2014 Crozes-Hermitage, Albéric Bouvet, Rhône, France, 13.5 per cent *Lea & Sandeman*, £19.75, down from £21.95 The top blend from Domaine Gilles Robin is this great 2015: bramble and cracked black pepper oomph and elegance.

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Some say that organic wine methods produce more aromatic, intense whites, and reds with better tannic structure

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