

Putting agency wines to the test: How key buyers and influencers assess New and Old world wines from Castelnau Wine Agencies



With participating buyers:

- Guillaume Mauhut, group wine buyer, ETM Group
- Tom Hunt, general manager Hawksmoor Air Street
- Vittorio Gentile, head sommelier, Theo Randall at the InterContinental Hotel
- Fleur Gomez, head of wine, Drake & Morgan





The Background

So far with the Buyer's Case initiative we have worked with individual wine producers to look at how well suited their portfolio of wines are to the needs of key premium and food-driven on-trade wine buyers.

It has proved a successful way of not only showing busy buyers potentially new and interesting wines in an efficient and independent way, but for wine producers to hear first hand what it is about their individual wines the buyers find either suitable or unsuitable for their businesses.

It has certainly proved to be practical and also commercial exercise in bringing drinks producers closer to the key decision makers and buyers across the premium on-trade.

So far, with the two projects completed, with Les Vignobles Foncalieu and Cave de Vignerons de Saint-Chinian, a number of the buyers involved have gone on to either list the specific wines tasted or go on to work with the producers on individual projects.

The Opportunity

Now with Castelnau Wine Agencies we have the opportunity to broaden The Buyer's Case initiative out and present a wider selection of wines covering twelve different producers from all around the world.

It is also the chance to showcase the diversity of the Castelnau Wine Agencies wider range as well as pin point specific wines that it is keen to hear direct feedback from key buyers as to their suitability to different channels of the premium on-trade.

The wines chosen to appear in The Buyer's Case were changed depending on the perceived needs of the four different buyers' involved and the styles of wine they are looking to put on their lists.

Independent advice

Our previous Buyers' Cases have provided invaluable insights into the decision making process that leading buyers go through in order to select the wines they want to buy.

They have also revealed the reasons why certain wines were deemed unsuitable for the individual buyers' outlets and what steps they would like to see the producer making in order to make the wines more commercially viable for their business.

It is that frank, independent advice that has quickly made The Buyer's Case unique in business publishing in that it potentially gives the platform and opportunity for drinks producers, importers and distributors to better understand their role and vitally the needs of key drinks buyers to help them do their job more efficiently.

The Buyer's Case projects have also confirmed what a complex sector the premium ontrade is. For whilst some wines were suitable for some buyers, they were not for others due to a series of factors, from the style of the wine, to not being able to fit in to their individual pricing structure.

To really understand the UK premium on-trade it is important to have a different strategy that is relevant to each of the specific on-trade channels and customer target groups.

What is The Buyer's Case?

The Buyer's Case sets out to:

- Allow drinks producers and suppliers to target their products at key buyers in the channels they want to work with.
- The Buyer will work with producers, or suppliers, to identify the outlets where they would like to see their beers, wines or spirits listed.
- We will recruit buyers in different operators and send them a case each of the products in question to be tasted and assessed.
- Providing direct feedback from the buyers about whether their product would, or would not be suitable for that outlet and why?





The Castelnau Wine Agencies' project

Castelnau might be well known for its acclaimed Champagne but its UK subsidiary imports wine from all over the world.

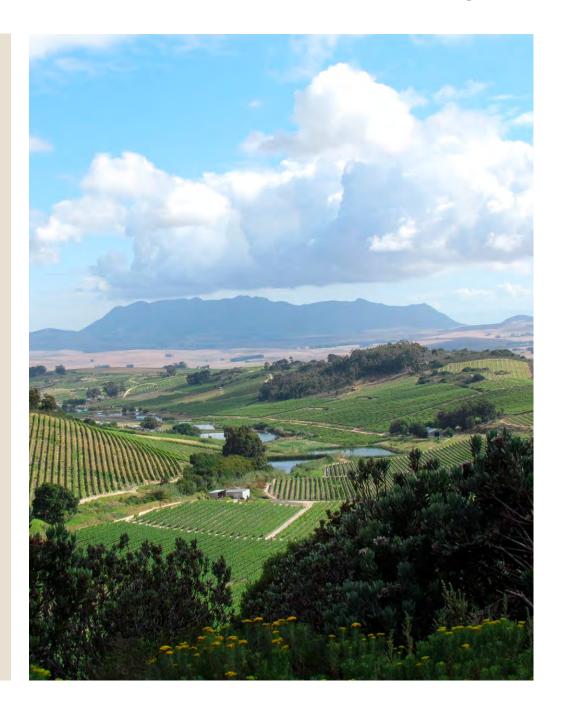
Here it explains why it has linked up with The Buyer on this project: "We've been quietly and successfully servicing the UK wine trade for over 35 years. We have long standing relationships with many of our wineries but we're constantly assessing the market and looking for ways to challenge ourselves to ensure we have the best wines for our customers' businesses. The on-trade is always one step ahead of the rest so it's the first place we look to for trends and for feedback on whether we've got our portfolio right. Having the opportunity to get honest input from some of the on-trades most influential figures just made sense."

If you are interested in finding out more information about Castelnau Wine Agencies and its range then please contact Matt Harrison, head of on-trade sales at matt@castelnau.co.uk or go to: www.castelnau.co.uk

Ideas in to action

Over the coming pages this report sets out:

- How the Castelnau Wine Agencies Project was put together?
- Which buyers and outlets agreed to take part?
- The Castelnau Wine Agencies' wines that were selected for each buyer and channel of the market.
- The direct feedback from each of the on-trade buyers involved.





How

In order to establish the right buyers and outlets to work with, The Buyer and Castelnau Wine Agencies first identified which channels of the premium on-trade were the most important and relevant for its wines.

The selected wines

- 1. Champagne de Castelnau Brut Réserve NV, France
- 2. Champagne de Castelnau Vintage 2003, France
- 3. St-Véran 2015, Patriarche Père et Fils, France
- 4. Puligny Montrachet 2011, Patriarche Père & Fils, France
- 5. Gevrey-Chambertin 2014, Patriarche Père & Fils, France
- 6. Eidos de Padriñan Albariño 2015, DO Rias Baixas, Spain
- 7. Xenna Chenin Blanc 2016, Swartland, South Africa
- 8. Oak Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2015, Elgin, South Africa
- 9. Oak Valley Chardonnay 2014, Elgin, South Africa
- 10. La Puerta Alta Malbec 2014, Famatina Valley, Argentina
- 11. Canto de Piedra Carmenère Reserva 2013, Colchagua Valley, Chile
- 12. Siete Fincas Cabernet Franc Reserve 2013, Mendoza, Argentina
- 13. Aluvios Carmenère Gran Reserva 2014, Colchagua Valley, Chile
- 14. Cycles Gladiator Pinot Noir 2013, California
- 15. Hahn GSM 2014, Central Coast, California
- 16. Hahn SLH Pinot Noir 2014, Santa Lucia Highlands, California
- 17. Lucienne 'Smith Vineyard' Pinot Noir 2013, Santa Lucia Highlands, California
- 18. Reata Chardonnay 2014, Los Carneros, Sonoma County, California
- 19. Double Lariat Cabernet Sauvignon 2014, Napa Valley, California
- 20. Tiki Sauvignon Blanc 2015, Marlborough, New Zealand

The key on-trade outlets

The final panel of buyers and outlets selected were:

- London wine bar chain
- Gastro and premium pub group
- Premium restaurant group
- Prestige hotel and restaurant operation

The Buyers Case: Castelnau Wine Agencies





The Buyers

The final panel of buyers and outlets selected were:



Guillaume Mauhut, ETM Group

Guillaume Mauhut is group wine buyer and trainer for this ever expanding premium, mainly London pub and restaurant chain, which now includes 12 outlets including the Chiswell Street Dining Rooms, The Botanist and The Jugged Hare.



Tom Hunt, Hawksmoor

Tom Hunt is the general manager of the Air Street branch of Hawksmoor overlooking London's busy Regent Street. As well as having overall responsibility for managing the restaurant, Hunt is also involved in wine buying for the group and is currently studying for his WSET Diploma.



Vittorio Gentile, head sommelier at Theo Randall InterContinental

Vittorio Gentile works closely with this award winning chef to create a list designed to match ingredients that are heavily influenced by the different seasons. He is also responsible for buying and managing the full beverage list for the restaurant.



Fleur Gomez, Drake & Morgan.

Fleur Gomez looks after both the wine range at this expanding bar and restaurant group which is on course to have 25 outlets across the country by the end of the year. Gomez is also head of learning and development for the group.

The process

Castelnau Wine Agencies selected the most appropriate wines from its range best suited for each buyer.

Individual cases were then sent to each of the buyers for them to taste.

The Questions

Each buyer was asked to assess the wines and answer the following questions.

• What do you think of the wine and the style?

- Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing (note there is no obligation to do so if yes)?
- If yes please explain why?
- What do you think of the price point?
- What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements?
- If you did list a wine would you put it on by the glass or the bottle or both? Explain why?
- Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?



Hawksmoor

Wines tasted by Tom Hunt

Champagne de Castelnau Brut Réserve NV, France

What do you think of the wine and the style?

This is a good Champagne. I believe British Airways has this as its pouring Champagne? It has the classic Champange nose and a very smooth, gentle and creamy mousse. It all comes together with a lovely mouth coating velvety texture. It is, though, also quite simple overall so we would have liked to have seen just a little more complexity on the palate. But overall this is a very drinkable and enjoyable Champagne.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing (note there is no obligation to do so if you say yes)?

We would not buy this wine for Hawksmoor. Although it is clearly a good Champagne we needed more beyond the delicate and creamy mousse and something really unique and individual to make us want to list it.

What do you think of the price point?

It is at a good price point so would be affordable to some outlets in the on-trade.

What do you think of the packaging? Any suggested improvements.

It has an OK label and the style and branding of the Champagne are all fine but I just don't think it would excite me much as a customer.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

It is at a good price to do well in other channels of the on-trade.

Oak Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2015, Elgin, South Africa

What did you think of the wine and the style?

This was our least favourite of the six wines we had to taste. It was under ripe and quite green and felt a bit out of balance when you look at all the parts separately and then together. It was also slightly vegetal and had some cheesy notes which we didn't feel worked for the wine and overall style. Put together I thought it would not be suitable as a sipping wine or to match with food. There is certainly good acidity there, but there again it took over any flavours so becomes a challenge for both a consumer and a retailer.



What did you think of the price point?

For the price I think there is a lot more choice in the market for this grape varietal with less challenging aromas.

What do you think of the packaging?

We did not warm to the label, the name of the brand or the packaging on this occasion. Overall we thought the bottle and label let it down.

Reata Chardonnay 2014, Los Carneros, Sonoma County

What did you think of the wine and the style?

This is a really interesting wine. It has lots of intensity, complexity of flavours and big textures. Crucially it also has good acid to cut through the richness and weight.

The other key comment was the screaming alcohol which was really noticeable.

This, though, is definitely a wine for food, particularly lobster etc. It is a good restaurant wine as we could pair this quite easily with a lot of different dishes and one glass each would be enough for a table of four or five.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider listing?

This is a wine I and Hawksmoor would consider as it is interesting and has a story which is backed up by the wine itself.



What did you think of the price point?

The price is OK, perhaps a little steep, but I think the wine justifies it. Our white wine selection at Hawksmoor is shorter and more concise than our red list so the wines have to stand out alongside some interesting, enjoyable but well priced and well made products.

What did you think of the packaging?

It has a nice bottle shape and an interesting and engaging label. It certainly lends itself to restaurant service as there is a story behind it.

Siete Fincas Cabernet Franc Reserve 2013, Mendoza

What did you think of the wine and the style?

The wine has lovely juicy fruit with a dusting of spice. It felt a little young and green on the edges, but this will improve in time. The tannins are a little chalky and stalky, but nothing a bit of steak marbling wouldn't complement.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider listing?

This is the kind of wine that could fit both with our menu and also our overall offering.

What did you think of the price point?

This is at an interesting price point for the on-trade as it could be justifiably sold from between £30-45 which is a very competitive area. With that in mind I think this wine would perform OK against other reds, but would need some selling due to the grape variety.

What did you think of the packaging?

It is good to look at. It has good typography and an interesting font that makes you want to look closer and pick it up.

Hahn GSM 2014, Central Coast, California

What do you think of the wine and the style?

It has lovely fruit which is backed up by complexity, intensity and length of flavours, all of which gives a quite jammy and rich ripeness to the wine. It also has good complexity and could be seen as a multi layered wine with all the parts contributing to the sum.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider listing?

I really enjoyed this wine. Definitely potentially one for Hawksmoor. GSM are also nice wines to talk about in the on-trade. Grenache and Syrah are familiar to a lot of customers, but Mouverdre is more unknown and needs a little explanation, but at the same time adds

so much to the wine even in small proportions.

What did you think of the price point?

It is also at an excellent price and offers real value for money for the product it is. It is an interesting style and a good blend which customers are becoming more and more interested in and accepting of over straight varietals.

Double Lariat Cabernet Sauvignon 2014, Napa Valley, California

What did you think of the wine and the style?

One word. Wow! But then we half expected it with the price tag and all the awards it has received. It is rich, dark, has notes of black fruit, smoke, spice, chocolate and it just kept on going. It is pronounced in every way.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider listing?

It is a big blockbuster of a wine and would sit nicely on a Hawksmoor menu and in my cellar! Big Californian reds fits nicely with our menu, even with all the stiff competition and are consistently popular. The richness and ripeness is very popular at present and is a natural fit for a steak house.

What do you think of the price point?

Californian Cabernet Sauvignon are big wines and are at the expensive end of the market so there is lots of competition, but I think it could stand up to them. Price is nearing the top end, but at Hawksmoor we would sell this comfortably for around £70 to £80. I think our guests would be very happy with that price and with the quality of the wine in return.





ETM Group

Wines tasted by Guillaume Mahaut

Xenna Chenin Blanc, 2016, Swartland, South Africa

What did you think of the wine and the style?

The wine has interesting delicate fruits, with touches of plum and apricot, lemon and grapefruits on the palate. The acidity, though, is slightly unbalanced and it lacks some concentration.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

It would not be suitable for what I am looking for.

What do you think of the price point?

It is a fair price. Unfortunately, I don't think it is at the level of quality that South Africa is producing at the moment.

What do you think of the packaging?

I feel the packaging is more suited to the off-trade. It is also using some sort of old century type face which is unclear what it relates to.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

For me this is very much an off-trade style of wine, or in a pub at the first price on the list.

Tiki Sauvignon Blanc 2015, Marlborough, New Zealand

What did you think of the wine and the style?

This ticks all the boxes for a Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand. It is fresh and has notes of pyrazin and gooseberry and is very aromatic. But I am not sure it is doing much more than.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Again it is not really the kind of wine we are looking to take on compared to what we already have on our list.

What do you think of the price point?

It feels quite expensive for the quality of the wine tasted.



What do you think of the packaging?

The wine, though, has nice packaging. It is smart as well as being clean and simple which I like.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

This is certainly a wine that would find listings in pubs or bars.

Cycles Gladiator Pinot Noir 2013, California

What do you think of the wine and the style?

This is a very oaky wine and has elements of burn and smoky notes. It is, though, light on the palate and has nice fresh cherry notes and ripe raspberry coming through. But the oak is taking over too much.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

It is an interesting wine to taste but in terms of a listing I think it is just a little too clumsy and is on the expensive side of things.



What do you think of the price point?

I appreciate this is from California but it still feels quite expensive for the quality that the wine is showing, but I know it is difficult to have something like this from California that is cheaper.

What do you think of the packaging?

It is a good fun label. It would certainly suit and attract a younger, alternative crowd looking for something with a bit of personality.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

This is the kind of wine that would work well both in a gastro pub environment and in the off-trade.

La Puerta Alta Malbec 2014, Famatina Valley, Argentina

What do you think of the wine and the style?

This is a wine with nice delicate fruits with a good level of ripeness. It has also a good fresh nose. The palate is on the same line with a fresh acidity with some under-ripe, positive notes.

Is this the kind of wine of you would consider listing?

Yes, it probably is.

What do you think of the price point?

The wine is positioned at a good price and matches nicely with the quality of the juice.

What do you think of the packaging?

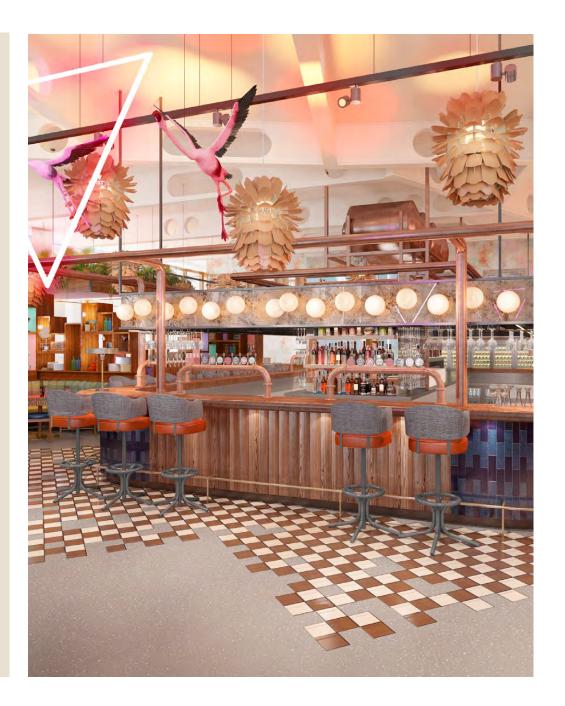
Overall it looks good. It has a nice smart feel to the packaging.

If you did list a wine would you suggest it is put on by the glass or the bottle or both?

This is definitely the kind of wine that can work by the glass. It is such an important line that it needs to be by the glass.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this wine is best suited for?

This is the kind of style of wine that can work just as well in a restaurant, in a gastro pub or in a bar.





TheoRandall at the InterContinental, London

Wines tasted by Vittorio Gentile

Summary

My overall comment about the wines I am looking to buy is that they must be suitable for the style of the restaurants in the InterContinental hotel: so therefore mainly Italian and modern Mexican (opening in spring 2017). I am generally looking for more expressive wines on the palate, with the duo of acidity and minerality in the foreground and a lively, changing bouquet in the glass.

Overall the wines tasted were well placed to service a number of different channels of the on-trade including wine bars, hotel bars, gastro-pub and steak houses. Outlets where you'd like the customer to be able to choose his or her own wines without the help of either the sommelier or a wine waiter. Customers that have a general understanding and awareness of what to expect from different grapes in different wine regions.

It was an interesting tasting illustrated by the good, clean and sober labels, that reflected well on the various styles of wines tasted.

Champagne de Castelnau Brut Réserve NV, France

What do you think of the wine and the style of it?

It has a very expressive nose of roasted nuts over sweet clementine, pink grapefruit and layers of fresh moss and chalky minerality. Unfortunately the palate seems detached: more on the grassy notes, medium bodied, sharp perlage and coating textured finish. It was overall not as round as I had expected.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

It is a Champagne at an interesting price and it has a good bouquet, but it is ultimately let down by the palate. It is also not in line with the my overall wine selection needs.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

This is a classic label with golden over green glass. I would, perhaps, work on the two tone of gold used in order to improve the clarity of the characters.

What channel of the on-trade do you think it is most suited for?

Mainly gastro pubs, wine bars and hotels.

Oak Valley Chardonnay 2014, Elgin, South Africa

What did you think of the wine and the style?

It is both elegant and complex with a good dose of mineral "Old World-style" notes. It has touches of ripe apple and melon, followed by fresh tobacco and spicy cream. It is overall well balanced on the palate despite the warming alcohol level.

Is this a wine you would consider buying?

This is certainly one of those wine I would have on the list. It would be ideal to be able to talk to a guest about how South Africa has a lot to offer in terms of value for money wines.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

Maybe a different proportion of sizes of the text will improve the appeal of the already clean and minimal label.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think it is most suited for?

This the kind of wine that will work well in various kinds of establishment, from the neighbourhood restaurant all the way up to appearing on Michelin starred wine lists.

Eidos de Padriñan Albariño 2015, DO Rias Baixas, Spain

What did you think of the wine and the style?

It has an explosive aromatic nose with intense lavender and undefined citrus and tropical bouquet with a hint of banana. This is followed by more shy and diluted flavours on what is a rounded palate. There is a dose of acidity and floral bitterness in the finish.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

It is quite monotonous overall considering its price tag, with what I would describe as a lack of real focus on the palate. Again this is not in line with my wine selection.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

Very good. It is certainly in line with the style of the wine.

What channel of the on-trade do you think it is most suited for?

As with the Oak Valley Chardonnay I can see this wine working in a number of various different types of restaurant, which have their focus not just on the New World.



Lucienne 'Smith Vineyard' Pinot Noir 2013, Santa Lucia Highlands, California

What did you think of the wine and the style?

It is bold and juicy from the first taste. A combination of ripe black plums and sour cherries with hints of spicy raspberries, tobacco and baking spices. It also has a rich, rounded and complex palate where spices are followed by more ripe and jammy black fruit notes. The wine has a medium acidity and an off dry tendency to it.

Is the kind of wine you would consider buying?

It is bold, exuberant but not repetitive. That said it is not supported on the palate where I would expect more freshness from a Pinot Noir.

What do you think of the price point?

The expectation the price gives you is not fully satisfied with the wine and it will be challenging to prefer this wine to some of its cousins in the same price range.

What do think of the design and the packaging?

It is definitively well thought through and has a lovely elegant look and feel to it.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is suited for?

An establishment that has an extensive wine list mainly focused on the New World.

Double Lariat Cabernet Sauvignon 2014, Napa Valley, California

What did you think of the wine and the style?

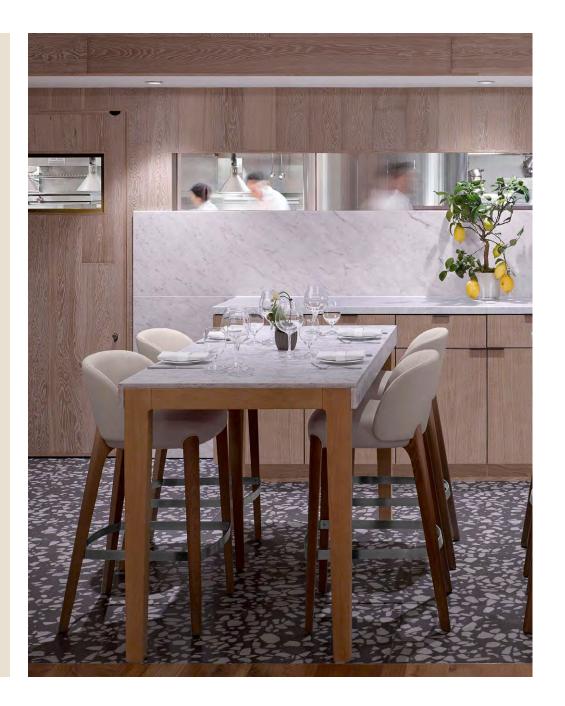
This is a benchmark Napa Cab. A little restrained with good potential for ageing. It has balsamic black currant leaves, notes of sour cherries, fresh tobacco leaves with chocolate and figs on the nose while the smooth attack opens the palate to violets and chocolate over sweet ripe tannins.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

A few more years in the cellar and this wine will definitively return the investment. I prefer to have wine at their top expression on my wine lists to drink now.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

It is clean and elegant overall with the dark glass and textured label giving the overall bottle and design a very good definition.





Drake & Morgan

Wines tasted by Fleur Gomez

Summary

Overall Fleur Gomez was impressed by the range of what she called "interesting" wines put forward for the tasting. From a buyer's perspective she felt some of the wines were more suited to a restaurant environment than the bar experience at Drake & Morgan.

Champagne de Castelnau Brut Réserve NV, France

What did you think of the wine and the style?

This is a very good Champagne. It is a dry Champagne style with a light bubble, brioche on the nose and dryness on the palate. It would be nice as an aperitif.

Is the kind the wine you would consider buying?

Not on this occasion as our customers would not be prepared to pay that much for an unbranded Champagne. But if it was at the right price I would consider buying this.

What do you think of the price point?

Again I think the price is too high for what is a non branded Champagne. It is priced closer to a Grande Marque level.

What do you think of the design and packaging?

It is a classic looking Champagne bottle and design which works well.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is most suited for?

I think you would need to sell this in a restaurant with a sommelier or dedicated member of staff and is better suited to the higher end of the market.

Tiki Sauvignon Blanc 2015, Marlborough, New Zealand

What did you think of the wine and the style?

This is classically tropical and grassy on the nose, with notes of asparagus and lychee on the palate. Very much a typical New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

I would certainly consider it. Particularly as New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs are still very

popular so if we listed this then I think it would sell well.

What do you think of the price point?

It is a little on the expensive side for the quality of the wine.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

I like it. It's great. It's nice, clean and simple.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is most suited for?

It is certainly aimed well at New World wine drinkers, but I think it is better placed in a bar environment than a restaurant.

St-Véran 2015, Patriarche Père et Fils, France

What did you think of the wine and the style?

This was a real highlight from the wines in the tasting. I thought it was great and I really liked it. It has a very light nose, with just a bit of minerality. It also has a great citrusy palate and is a light expression for Bourgogne.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

If it was for a restaurant that could be hand sold with a sommelier, then, yes.

What do you think of the price point?

It's not bad, but I fear it is too expensive for our customers who wouldn't know it, which would be a problem selling it.

What do you think of the design and packaging?

It is a classic Bourgogne label with a nice modern twist.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is most suited for?

It would need to be in a restaurant with a sommelier and is aimed more at the connoisseur wine customer.

Canto de Piedra Carmenère Reserva 2013, Colchagua Valley, Chile

What did you think of the wine and the style?

It has nice chocolate and dark fruits, combined with a light nose a short finish.



Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

It is not the kind of wine that is suitable for our list.

What do you think of the price point?

The price is OK, but is also not the best value for money.

What do you think of the design and packaging?

It has a lot going on, but is probably a bit too busy.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is most suited for?

It would be suitable for more mainstream pubs rather than the bar market that we operate in.

Cycles Gladiator Pinot Noir 2013, California

What did you think of the wine and the style?

It was a light wine, fruity, almost tasting like a Gamay.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

Not this time round. But in terms of the overall taste and the style of the label.

What did you think of the price point?

I did not think it offered good value for money for the price.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

It is not for me. It is too busy.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is most suited for?

I see this as more of a retail wine rather than being sold in the on-trade.

La Puerta Alta Malbec 2014, Famatina Valley, Argentina

What did you think of the wine and the style?

I thought this was great. It is full of spices, has ripe cherries on the nose and palate.

Is this the kind of wine you would consider buying?

Yes this would be a good wine for our list.

What did you think of the price point?

It is a good value and quality Malbec for the price.

What did you think of the design and packaging?

Yes they work well together and add to the overall look and feel of the wine.

Which channel of the on-trade do you think this is most suited for?

I can see this working in most channels of the trade. It is a good tasting wine, at a good value with quality design. If Corney & Barrow presented me this wine, I would buy it.









www.the-buyer.net

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