



# GATH'RING WINTER FUEL

Unlike Good King Wenceslas, **Jonathan Ray** need not brave the rude wind's wild lament to restock his cellar. He can go online or ring his merchant and say "Bring me wine"

I'M no fan of January but then who is? But at least the dire spectre of Christmas no longer hangs over and our lives (and diets) can go back normal. A ghastly business, the festive season; we'll be well shot of it. The first week of this dread month will be spent ridding myself of my hangover, and I will be taking plenty badly needed exercise on my way to rid from the bottle bank. There will be jolly jaunts to the recycling bins and a trip to the Christmas tree dump, which means, thank God, that I can be my corner of the sitting-room k. Needless to say, then it'll be off to returns queue at Marks & Sparks. Most importantly, though, I will need to concentrate on replenishing what I grandly call my cellar (in truth a snug cubby-hole under the stairs). Last year is anything to go by, my cellar won't be the only thing to have a pounding over the festivities. Twelve months ago, as I surveyed empty wine racks, I thought I'd be turned over by burglars. There was hardly anything left apart from a crushed magnum of claret, a bottle of red sherry and a thimbleful of port. I says that my wife had overlooked. I detected a distinct whiff of cordite, too. And then it all suddenly came flooding back - how I'd attempted a Rorke's Drift-like defence of my last remaining bottles in the face of a determined New Year's Eve onslaught from the neighbours. And it wasn't as if they hadn't brought any presents with them. They're a well-armed bunch but their thirsts are seemingly unquenchable and it

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was utter carnage. There were gaping holes in the racks where bottles of champagne and magnums of claret once proudly lay and, trawling through the wreckage, I realised that many of the wines that had been drunk had no business being broached for at least another five years. Sigh.

In fact, this is an important lesson: never store at home those bottles that you don't want drunk. Store such purchases at the merchants from whom you bought them or at special cellarage places such as Octavian Vaults ([www.octavianvaults.co.uk](http://www.octavianvaults.co.uk)) or Smith & Taylor ([www.smithandtaylor.com](http://www.smithandtaylor.com)).

Here, for a modest annual fee, you can store your wines even if you bought them elsewhere, fully insured, and in a temperature-controlled environment, drawing on them as and when you want. They'll be out of temptation's way and - if an investment - a lot easier to sell on than if you kept them at home under the bed.

But forget the fancy stuff for a moment - early spring is best for that, when the top Bordeaux chateaux are sold *en primeur*. How best to stock up on the everyday quaffers?

First stop will be the supermarkets. Nearly all have some sort of January sale and they're worth investigating although you must tread with care. Some of the so-called discounts are based on grossly inflated original RRP's. And there's

## 6 EVERYDAY WINES FOR THE CELLAR



**2010 ARNAUD DE VILLENEUVE CHARDONNAY**  
**£8, Private Cellar**  
 Remarkably fresh and full-flavoured white.



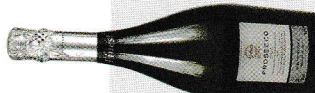
**2007 GRAN SANGRE DE TORO**  
**£8, Cooperative**  
 Rich, robust Spanish red from family-owned Torres.



**2008 BERRYS' GOOD ORDINARY CLARET**  
**£8.75, Berry Bros & Rudd**  
 Benchmark house claret: soft, smooth and ripe.



**2010 CONO SUR RESERVA PINOT NOIR**  
**£10, Waitrose**  
 Terrific value, a really grown-up pinot.



**TESCO FINEST PROSECCO**  
**£9.50, Tesco**  
 The best own-label prosecco around today.



**2005 PIERRE OLIVIER MERCUREY BLANC**  
**£13.50, From VineyardsDirect**  
 A mature white burgundy, full of lemon, honey and spice.

not much point in stocking up on Blossom Hill or Blue Nun on a "buy one get one free". Let's face it, you'll never drink them.

Aim for something with a bit of style, such as Wither Hills Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, which Waitrose is offering for £6.66 a bottle, down from £9.99 (at the time of writing - you'll need to check); or how about the Cave de Tain Crozes-Hermitage? Waitrose has lopped one third off the price, leaving it at £7.32, down from £10.99. Worth it, I'd say.

But the independents, too, have January sales and even if Yapp Brothers is in Wiltshire or Private Cellar is in Cambridgeshire and you're in Newcastle or Aberdeen, you can order online and have the wines delivered the next day or the day after.

I'll be stocking up on my Good Ordinary Claret from Berrys, of course, a staple throughout the year, and one that's even better with a little bit of extra bottle age. I'll earmark some beefy reds from Spain and Italy and some characterful whites to see me through the winter.

I'll nab some fizz, too, but since I'm too strapped after Christmas for champagne, I'll happily make do with the Tesco Finest Prosecco, made by one of my favourite producers, Bisol.

And I'll be keeping an eye on what From VineyardsDirect (one of my very favourite merchants) has up its sleeve. A few months ago, I bought some half bottles of 2009 Haut-Charmes Sauternes from there for £15.50 each. A bit of a steal when you learn that it's the over-production from Château d'Yquem - same vines, same wine-making team, same production values - whose wines currently sell for £500-plus a bottle. In fact, it's such good value, I might even let the neighbours have a crack at it.