We ended our tasting year on December 20th with a **social Zoom session**, the theme being “W**ines being served on Christmas Day**”. For those who did not partake, you may wish to seek out the following:

*John Badley –* ***N/V CREMANT D’ALSACE BRUT, WolJerger***. Good gentle stream of bubbles. Crisp apple nose then a fresh green apple palate with a touch of white pepper accompanied by the creamy foamy mousse. A perfect representa6on of this underrated appella6on. Bought for €8 in France. Not available in UK, but es6mated cost now £15 (£22 in USA).

*Gill Caldwell –* ***2004 ALTER EGO de PALMER, CB***. Second label of Chateau Palmer, earlier known as La Reserve du General. Compared to the 2003s, the 2004 vintage was more classically Bordeaux, offering a magnificent combinayion of all the elegance and finesse of Palmer terroir with the richness and power of a great year. Now in its more mature garb this was perfect and certainly ready to drink – in fact so easy Christmas Day would need another bottle. So many layers with ripe tannins soon giving way to luscious black fruits. Bought around 2009 from Sainsbury at £28.49; now available at between £90 to £95 a bottle. Good investment.

*Les Charles –* ***1998 CHATEAUNEUF DU PAPE, CLOS DES PAPES, Paul Avril.*** This was being repatriated to France for Christmas, but might prove a tad tricky to match with a “non-meat” diet. 1998 in Chateauneuf was excellent – best in the Rhone - and Avril’s example is near the top of pile. At its peak, or certainly on its plateau this was superb; ready and well worth the wait. Originally bought en-primeur from The Wine Society for £75 each 6/pack, it now retails at between £75 and £87 per bottle. More astute investing.

*John Davis –* ***1967 CHATEAU LATOUR CB.*** This wine was leG aGer the “old wines sell-off” in February. Four bottles had dodgy corks that meant some air had seeped in – 50 year rule of recorking should have been noted – but the balance leG in cellar were all good and des6ned to accompany sirloin steak on Christmas Day. Unlike the February sample that was lifeless, this sample was s6ll fruity and reasonably full-bodied for this vintage which in Bordeaux was noted for quantity rather than quality with wines lacking substance to withstand long storing. Latour, as oGen, proved the exception, with any casks not up to Grand Vin standard being relegated to the second label. Shared with *JB & RS*, we were amazed how it continued to improve throughout the evening, becoming even frui6er – blackcurrant with a good mature cedar strap. Even beLer with food.

*Margaret Fox –* ***2021 CABALIE IGP, Côtes Catalanes.*** This is one of the most important IGPs in the Languedoc-Roussillon region. A smooth, richly spiced, black fruit dominated nose. A Grenache-charged, old-vine gem, brimful of spicy berry fruit. According to Laithwaites [who supply The Sunday Times Wine Club] Cabalié needs no ceremony. Just large glasses for serving! This was an unwiwng 3 cases for the price of 2, so plenty left for Christmas! £8 reduced from £10 by STWC, Laithwaites sell it for £11.99.

*Jenny Heald –* ***2021 ALVARINHO, VINHO VERDE.*** As with a number of our Zoomers, *JH* would be “out” for Christmas Day, so this choice was an appetiser for the festives. The Atlantic influenced, cool climate Minho region of Portugal produces wines of exceptional freshness and finesse. Suitably vibrant, this increasingly popular grape (Albarino in Spanish regions) was typically fruity with notes of limes, grapefruit and peach. From Aldi - £5.99.

*Tim Jones –* ***N/V CREMANT DE LOIRE, Ladubay.*** This would feature in a number of wines for the day (including back-ups – including Gewurztraminer Turckheim, Pedro Ximenez, LBV Port and Monbazillac). Using the 'méthode traditionnelle’ this complex and elegant blend of Chenin & Chardonnay was rich on the palate yet had a zesty apple freshness. From the chalky soils of the Loire Valley, this elegant sparkling wine is made by Mlle Ladubay, a winery founded in 1851. From Sainsbury Taste the Difference range, reduced from £12 to £10.

*Angela Roach –* ***2019 BRUT RESERVE, GUSBOURNE.*** Sampled at the estate, all of the grapes were sourced solely from Gusbourne vineyards - 60 hectares at Gusbourne Estate in Kent and 30 hectares in West Sussex. Planted with the 3 classic English Sparkling varieties of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, the estate was only created in 2004, but has shot up the quality charts. Bright gold in colour; red fruit aromas of cherry and strawberry, which develop into attractive fresh pastry notes with a touch of cinnamon and spice. Light and off-dry with a bright streak of citrus fruit, the palate is clean and fresh, giving stone fruit tones and a long, refreshing finish. Advertised at the cellar door for £45 (£46.90 from Hedonism). Also purchased the 2018 Blanc de Noir which spends 27 months on its lees and 6 months in bottle pre-release, a snip at £59!!

*Roger Sanbrook –* ***2000 CHIANTI CLASSICO, CASTELLO-BROLIO, Barone Ricasoli.*** This wine is now labelled as 'Castello di Brolio, Chianti Classico Gran Riserva DOCG'. From the largest and oldest wine estate in the Chianti Classico region this is one of the four oldest businesses in the world. Based at the famous Castello di Brolio in Gaiole, it is known for its top-quality Sangiovese-dominant wines. Undated critic tasting note from Wine Searcher: "*Inky and raw, but in the best way. This is an unbridled, unchained monster of a Chianti, one with impeccable depth and extraction but also one that doesn't sit on your palate like dead weight. Racy acids and firm tannins work in tandem to prop up the bulky dark fruit, creating a structured, delicious mass." - 92/100.* Now – really deep shade defying its 22 years. Slight rubbery hint of mature Sangiovese, but gives way to floral yet big black fruit aromas. SoG and ripe on palate s6ll with solid tannins to hold back the lushness of the fruit. The source was a mystery, but what a delight. Current value £34 – if you can find any.

*Nick Seymour –* ***N/V NICOLAS FEUILLATTE BRUT, CHAMPAGNE*** (much sampled by AWC), ***2006 CLOS DU CLOCHER, CB*** (top Pomerol described as “*KräXiges Rubingranat, zarte violeZe Reflexe, Wasserrand. In der Nase exoJsche Würznote, feine Frucht, etwas Tabak und Orangenschalen. Am Gaumen ausgewogen, miZlerer Körper, dunkle Beerenfrucht, kraXvolle Tannine, lässt im Finish etwas nach, zart nach Nougat und BiZerschokolade im Rückgeschmack*”, which actually translates prrtty well. Reaching its tasting peak) ***& 1994 CROFT*** – all unopened destined for an away-day Christmas with friends.

*Doug Stoneham –* ***2018 SAUMUR CHAMPIGNY, LOIRE.*** To get into the Loire mood for the ***VOUVRAY TRADIONAL METHOD*** Christmas wine, this fragrant and light Cabernet Franc drank well. £10 from Majestic.

*Simon Stoye –* ***MADEIRA 10 YEAR OLD, 4 WINE SELECTION, Blandy.*** From 20cl bottles, the four were SERCIAL (48 g/l sugar), VERDELHO (73 g/l), BUAL (100 g/l) & MALMSEY (123 g/l). Sampled ready for the Christmas table, all gave the oxidative Madeira nose, but each showed its own nuance, different from each other. An indulgence that didn’t cost the earth. Set of 4 £35 from Amazon.