

## Drinking outside the box

World Cups are the perfect time to try a little 'drinking outside the box.' With sixteen wine producing nations competing in Brazil there's plenty to stir the imagination and the UK, as the world's biggest wine importer, is unparalleled when it comes to customer choice. So, this month, I'd encourage you to keep the cork in your favourite tippie and embrace the spirit of the World Cup by discovering something new and exciting. After all, it only comes around every four years!

Italy, England's opponent tonight, is second only to France in wine sales to the UK and enjoys the prestige of being the only country in the world to produce wine in all its many regions. Historically, it was known as Oenotria (land of the vines) and the present day more than lives up to the legend, with over a thousand different grape varieties being grown in the nation.

Vermentino, Verdicchio, Falanghina and Pecorino are just some of the evocative names to look out for if you've a hankering for a crisp and zingy white. However, my current favourite is a blend of two grape varieties, Fiano and Greco, from Puglia (the heel of Italy). **A Mano, Fiano-Greco - £ 8.99** is a pale lemon wine showing explosive floral notes, exotic fruit flavours of peach and apricot, crisp acidity and a refreshing finish. Try it with grilled white fish, pan fried shellfish or lightly spiced dishes.

France has long been the UK's favourite wine producer and its wines are familiar to most. However, down in the Languedoc region, famed primarily for its gutsy, herbaceous reds, is the lesser known white wine of **Picpoul de Pinet, La Croix Gratiot - £ 9.75**. It's a wine that's chock full of vibrant citrus, pear, stone fruit and spice flavours with a fresh, cleansing, lively acidity. Try with fishy pasta dishes whilst watching the early evening matches.

Third in our nation's vinous affections is Australia. In recent years, Tasmania, the island off its Southern Coast, has been forging a reputation for quality Pinot Noir and a glass of **Devil's Corner Pinot Noir - £ 13.99** with a plate of charcuterie is sure to lift the spirits even during the most teeth grindingly dull matches.

Spain, the current World Cup holder, is fourth in the wine sales league and very keen to make the point that it's not all about Rioja. For those full blooded encounters later in the tournament, try **Juan Gil 4 Meses Monastrell - £ 8.99** from the Jumilla region in the South East of the country. It's 15% ABV, has layers of juicy blackberry, lush spicy plum and cherry fruit notes and is best enjoyed with grilled or barbecued red meat.

We'll skip over the next three bestselling countries – Chile, New Zealand and USA – and consider instead our old foe, Germany. Once very fashionable, German whites made from the Riesling grape are adored by the wine trade but are, at best, treated with indifference and suspicion by the general public. Why? Simply, these classic wines have a natural sweetness which is off putting to many and this resistance has, in recent times, led to the development of trocken (dry) Rieslings which have proven to be far more palatable to modern drinkers. Try **Dr. Loosen Red Slate Dry Riesling - £ 10.50** for a taste of the new Germany. Of course, if it goes to penalties I'd recommend something far stronger.

Portugal, tenth for UK wine sales, is, after Italy, the country that best serves the adventurous drinker. Like Spain, it suffered under a dictatorship until the 1970's and had very little international trade. This proved to be good for the country's wine industry as its insularity ensured that it never really embraced international grape varieties. So now Portugal is the proud possessor of over 400 indigenous grape varieties. For all day World Cup quaffing, try the low alcohol (11.5%) **Vinho Verde, Quinta da Raza - £ 9.25** from the far North of the country. Its alluring flavours of orchard fruit and lime allied to a lively acidity make for a perfect match with seafood.

Tonight, I'll be anxiously drinking **Marchesi di Gresy Chardonnay**, a beautiful wine made from a French grape, in Northern Italy by a Kiwi winemaker. How's that for global cosmopolitanism? Let's just hope our players exhibit a similar worldliness in Manaus! Good luck England.