

New Year is always a time for reflection, and if there's one thing that I've gleaned from the past 12 months – it's to pat myself on the back for still being here! Globally, nationally, locally and personally, it's been a challenging time and it's an achievement to still have one's sanity!

At Barrica we're very excited to have been shortlisted as one of three finalists in the UK Wine Retailer of the Year category of the Drinks Retailing Awards! The results will be announced at the awards dinner to be held at the Dorchester Hotel in London in February, so keep your fingers crossed for the north west!

Just to have reached this stage is great, and what better way to celebrate than with a glass of something cold and fizzy which won't break the bank. Santa Bax Brut sparkling (£12.75) is an Argentinian blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, two of the grapes used in the making of Champagne. An organic offering from Jean Bousquet, a favourite winemaker of ours who seems to produce quality in everything he makes. This wine has a beautiful, delicate salmon pink colour, peach and strawberry fruit and soft acidity. Perfect as an aperitif, with rainbow trout, or just to enjoy a glass on a cold January evening!

If it's something warming and comforting you're looking for, Chapel Hill Cabernet Sauvignon from McLaren Vale (£14.75) awarded Gold for Best in its Class at the 2009 London International Wine and Spirit Competition. Outstanding crimson in colour and totally opaque with aromas of ripe blackcurrant, cedar and dark chocolate, this has a hint of tobacco and truffle. It is a big full bodied McLaren Vale Cabernet with excellent weight and concentration of fruit, alcohol and tannin.

Portugal is a country which is synonymous with Port and Ferreira's 2000 LBV (£14) is a superb example of quality



Expert *Jane Cuthbertson* recommends some of the best comforting and warming wines

at an affordable price. It has a terrific deep, glass-staining concentration, wonderful ripe fruit blending harmoniously with figs and molasses and a warm, decadent finish.

Chateau de Beaulon is an estate in the Cognac region of France where there is no compromise of quality in favour of commercial gain. The 12-year-old Cognac is, strictly speaking, a VSOP which

must be aged for at least four years. Such is the commitment of Chateau de Beaulon, they only release their cognac when they believe it has reached perfect condition, in this case 12 years. Almost orangey golden in the glass with bread, almond, gorse and wild peach and cinnamon on the nose. As smooth a cognac as you could wish to find.

Of course, January is the month

when we celebrate Burns' night and we will be joining in the fun at Barrica with a "tatties and neeps" night, complete with a selection of malt whiskies – further details are available from Barrica.

Anyone know a piper? ■

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