

Wine: how to cut down the smart way

Drinking less may suit you better than abstinence, and one way to do that is to go for wines with lower abvs



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You don't have to go without... Photograph: Jeremy Autton-Hibbert /Alamy

Almost invariably, new year's resolutions relating to booze involve some sort of period of abstinence. But wouldn't it be rather more sensible to reshape our drinking habits simply by drinking less instead?

One obvious way to achieve this would be to drink wines with less alcohol in them. As I've pointed out here before, one 175ml glass of 14% abv wine is 2.5 units, or as much as the guidelines say a woman should be drinking in a day, whereas a 125ml glass of a 12% abv wine is only 1.5 units. Sure, this may involve retraining your palate, which won't happen overnight, but it can be done – just think how you gave up sugar in tea, say, or milk in coffee. (Assuming, of course, you did.)

Red wine tends to be more of a challenge in this regard than white, but I recently drank an 11.5% abv syrah with a richly sauced grouse dish to which it stood up admirably well. The hugely appealing Domaine Condamine Syrah-Mourvèdre Côtes de

Thongue 2013 (£6.25 [The Wine Society](#), £7.75 [Oddbins](#)) is slightly higher in alcohol than that, at 12.5% abv, but it would do a similar job and I don't think anyone would regard it as wimpy. Or at the same abv, try the [Martinfort Carignan Sélection Vieilles Vignes Pays d'Hérault 2013](#) (£7.40 Tanners), a fresh, juicy carignan that still has plenty of robust Languedoc character.

Another strategy – and one that rather appeals to me – could be to spend what you normally do on wine in a week on one single bottle, by way of reward for drinking less. A wine such as Nuits St Georges producer Domaine Naudin Ferrand's delicate, ethereal [Orchis Hautes-Côtes de Beaune](#) (£29.95 Berry Bros & Rudd, or £26.95 if you buy a case; 12% abv), which buyer Jasper Morris says is a personal favourite. This wine deserves to be sipped, rather than swigged, so a glass a night over four or six days would be a real treat.

If you're more of a white wine drinker, you could consider switching to English wine this coming month, because it's generally low in alcohol. Give your local winery a go, if you have one, but if not, next time you feel like a sauvignon blanc, try Davenport's deliciously fragrant, elderflower-scented Horsmonden White 2013 (£11.99 [Vinceremos](#), £12.45 [sustainablewines.co.uk](#); 11.5% abv) – that's a welcome breath of summer on a winter's day (and organic, too). Or the gold medal-winning Albourne Estate White Pinot Noir 2013 at just 11% (£12.95 [South Downs Cellars](#), or from [albourneestate.co.uk](#)), which, despite the lack of bubbles, tastes intriguingly like champagne – or English fizz, come to that.

Fiona has been voted International Wine and Spirit Competition Blogger of the Year 2014 for her website [matchingfoodandwine.com](#)



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