



**Taittinger Brut Réserve Non-Vintage Champagne. Bin 56956; £25.99** I know, I know, £25.99 is quite a stash, but if you want to offer Père Noël a glass of something to encourage him to empty his sack around your chimney, try this. I have tasted the entire Champagne range in Waitrose recently, and there's no doubt in my mind that Taittinger is hard to beat; particularly if, like me, you love Champagne in a creamy, flowery style, as frothy as a sabayon yet fruit-perfumed, too. If £26 is too much, then the Waitrose own-label Blanc de Blancs non-vintage (bin 83818; £16.99) is made in the same gossamer style. It's a touch softer and sweeter; tasted blind, you wouldn't guess the difference was as much as £9.



**Villa Maria Private Bin Pinot Gris 2004 East Coast, New Zealand. Bin 57401; £6.99** Away from its French home slopes, Pinot Gris proves a hard grape variety to coax into articulacy. If any nation can make a success of it, it is probably going to be New Zealand – the natural home of the aromatic white in the southern hemisphere. Sure enough, aromatic this is: scents of pear and apple waft out over the gently creamy notes from its 40 per cent barrel fermentation. In the mouth, it's bigger and richer than you'd expect; indeed the ripeness of the fruit almost makes it seem sweet, though analytically it's a dry wine. This would be a great aperitif to set your wine-loving friends guessing, and it would accompany smoked fish or creamy pasta handsomely, too.



**Palha-Canas 2003 Estremadura, Portugal. Bin 68886; £6.99** This is the first of two reds, both designed to set the family glowing around the Christmas dinner table. This one is Portuguese, made from a rich mix of native grape varieties given an attractively sweet, aunt-seducing sheen with a little American and Portuguese oak. Tell the youngsters it smells of cherry and popcorn, and they may take an interest, too. In the mouth, it's deftly fruited (plums take over from cherries), yet there's enough density and vigour to ensure the turkey doesn't grab all the limelight. Decant after breakfast if you can.

