

## Supermarket wines sparkle in world's top awards

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They are traditionally found in the hands of sommeliers and the cellars of French châteaux, but fine wines have taken up a new residence: Aldi.

Nearly 500 own-brand supermarket wines have won awards in one the world's most influential competitions.

The International Wine Challenge (IWC), a contest in which medal-winning wines are blind-tasted three times by at least ten judges, gave prizes to 498 supermarket wines from Aldi, Asda, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Co-operative and Waitrose. Of those, 33 were gold.

The competition, in its 31st year, gave a record number of medals to supermarket wines including champagnes, sherries and ports.

There were also awards for English winemakers, with a total of 72 wines honoured compared with 38 in 2014.

Charles Metcalfe, a co-chairman of the IWC said: "The increased variety and quality this year astounded the judges. We have come to expect top quality sparkling wines from certain vineyards, but it was wonderful to see more wineries scooping top prizes, and more diversity across different styles.

"On the evidence of the English wines we tasted at the competition, our national wine industry has a very bright future."

Marks & Spencer received the greatest acclaim, winning 169 medals, including 12 gold, 52 silver and 105 bronze, and getting special mention for its £13 Mount Bluff NV Sparkling Chardonnay, which is expected to be a particular favourite with shoppers.

Tesco won five gold medals and Morrisons four, but the stand-out winner for value was Aldi, with two £8 gold medal winners from its Exquisite Collection. The budget chain's Private Bin Sauvignon Blanc 2014 and Clare Valley Riesling 2014 topped a list of ten of the most widely available gold medallists picked by the IWC for The Times.

Sainsbury's was awarded four gold, 16 silver and 40 bronze medals. Among its big hits were a £20 Blanc Champagne Brut NV, its Taste the Difference Sancerre 2014 (£12.75) and the Pouilly Fumé l'Antique 2014, all of which won gold.

Of the English winners, Court Garden, of East Sussex, scooped two gold medals and England's largest vineyard, Chapel Down in Kent, picked up nine medals, including one gold.

Hambledon Vineyard in Hampshire, Bluebell Vineyard Estate in East Sussex, and Wiston Estate in West Sussex also won golds.

Mr Metcalfe added that the growth in ranges of wines on supermarket shelves are part of a charm offensive to win over customers with a taste for adventure.

"The retailers are trying to sell them more interesting wines. It's all part of a bigger plan as far as supermarkets are concerned . . . Nowadays we are much more adventurous with our wines too. It used to be a luxury – it was an extravagance – but now wine is very much part of the weekly shop.

"Not only are they trying to get more profitability but if they can persuade consumers that their wine is sexier than at the supermarket down the road, they will win them over more easily than with something like loo roll."