

Versatile Vinegars

Vinegars don't just go on chips. We look at some specialist varieties on the market, and their uses

1. RICH, VISCOUS AND VERSATILE

Part of the KFF Year Balsamic Vinegar is an authentic vinegar traditionally produced in Modena and owes its flavour to years spent maturing in wooden casks. The production process starts with the crushing of sun-ripened grapes which are reduced over wood fires to about 40% of their original weight. The liquid is then placed in wooden barrels of oak, cherry, mulberry, chestnut and juniper for ageing. Each year, as the liquid evaporates, the vinegar is transferred into smaller barrels of different woods.

Eventually this process produces a very rich, viscous, almost sweet-tasting balsamic vinegar which nevertheless retains its characteristic acidity. It lends itself to many applications, and as it's so rich, chefs need use only very little.

PRICE: £15.75 (list price) for a 250ml bottle

AVAILABLE FROM: KFF 01622 612245

2. MATURED FOR FOUR YEARS

The latest addition to IB Food's Vinicato range of condiments is Sweet Orange Vinicato, a sweet, velvety vinegar with the subtle overtones of spices and oranges. Two varieties of grapes, Negroamaro

and black Malvasia, are dried on the vine, and the must is boiled gently to reduce in quantity and put in aged oak barrels to mature for four years to allow the taste to develop. The original Vinicato has been produced since 1825 using a closely guarded traditional recipe, and this new line has been introduced to give chefs a new ingredient for such uses as drizzling over roasted and barbecued meats or grilled vegetables, adding to salads or even desserts such as vanilla ice-cream, fresh grilled peaches or pears and panna cotta.

PRICE: £6.96 for a 250ml bottle, packaged in cartons of six

AVAILABLE FROM: IB Food 0890 252522 www.ibfood.com

3. IN THE ANCIENT TRADITION

Comunop's eight-year-old Balsamic Vinegar of Modena is still prepared in the ancient tradition by a small family company. The blend is made from the cooked must of Trebbiano grapes, blended with strong red wine vinegar with an enriched flavour, further concentrated by being passed through a series of wooden casks of oak, chestnut, cherry, mulberry and juniper for eight years. The result is a dark brown vinegar, viscous in texture and with a distinct aroma and rich

flavour for use as a flavouring, seasoning or as a sauce to drizzle and decorate a wide range of sweet and savoury dishes.

PRICE: £30 for a 500ml squeeze bottle

AVAILABLE FROM: Carriocopa Foods 08450 633 699 www.carriocopafoods.co.uk

4. TRUE TASTE OF THE FRUIT

Rutherford & Meyer was started in the rolling hills of rural Canterbury, New Zealand, in 1996 by two local farming wives before moving in 2001 to the coastal capital city of Wellington. The company's original focus was finding ways to use surplus summer fruit and it has produced a range of gourmet fruit-based products that are 100% natural, contain no added preservatives (though occasionally a specific ingredient may require a preservative to aid composition) and resemble the true taste of the fruit.

The company's fruit vinegars contain 50% fruit and are available in four flavours – fig & red wine, blackcurrant, strawberry and raspberry. Suggested uses are for marinating meats or vegetables, using in fruit-based chutneys, dressings or vinaigrettes, as dipping



oil, or poured over ice-cream.

PRICE: £4.50 for 250ml

AVAILABLE FROM: Kai Kitchen 01273 732981 www.kaikitchen.co.uk

5. FRESH FROM SUCCESS

Newly available in the UK following its success in North America is Minus 8 Wine Vinegar, which is made in an almost identical way to Ice Wine Vinegar (Eiswein) and has already found favour with some of the UK's top chefs. The grapes used are grown in a vineyard in Okatawa, Canada, a cool climate region for grape-growing. It has been owned by the vinegar maker's family for three generations, and in the last 30 years it has been replanted with French Vitisfera and French hybrids.

The vinegar is made from about eight varieties of red and white grapes that are picked well past their normal harvest date in the winter when the temperature drops to at least -8°C, and the water component of the juice turns to ice inside the fruit, leaving the acid, sugars and flavours in liquid form to be

pressed out. The temperature must hold for several days to obtain a solid freeze and the best quality juice. The grapes are immediately pressed at freezing temperatures to extract the purest juice and the winemaking stage then takes six to nine months.

Turning the wine into vinegar is by way of traditional bacterial fermentation of the alcohol, producing acetic acid. Minus 8 is aged several years before release, partially in French oak. It's blended in a similar way to sherry in a solera system. The first vintage of vinegar is 1997, and each subsequent vintage is aged separately. When ready, a portion of each vintage is blended for the final product. A portion of each vintage is reserved for blending in future years. This brings complexity of flavour and depth of age to the process.

The vinegar can be used for flavouring finished foods or to marinate, mixed with oil for dressings, incorporated into sauces, or gently reduced for extra viscosity and concentration.

PRICE: £17 per 200ml bottle when bought by the case (12 bottles) or £19.50 per single bottle

AVAILABLE FROM: Oakleaf European 01202 993311 www.oakleaf-european.co.uk