



For the traditionalist

The Montpellier, Harrods £275

As the reviewing panel circled this attractive seagrass basket with its embossed faux-leather lid, there was a sense of expectation, a feeling that Christmas really may have come early. We steered clear of the Ultimate Hamper at £5,000 but plumped for a chilled one. This hamper includes perishables, including smoked duck, smoked venison and a splendid cheeseboard as well as a mini-Stilton in a ceramic pot — so you have to be precise about delivery dates.

It is possibly the most sophisticated of the hampers reviewed, as one might expect of one named after a secluded square in Knightsbridge; in addition to the delights listed above, there are five wines included which combine with the food rather well: a supple Corbières (Cuvée Fruité, Domaine du Trillol) made for a good, robust match with saucisson and even the smoked duck; the intense and ripe single vineyard Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon (Vision, Cono Sur) was thoroughly enjoyable and equally at home with the game and the very popular cheeseboard.

Overall, there was a very good balance between the unusual (mini salami bites and a Stilton spoon) and the predictable (marmalade and teabags) resulting in even relatively mundane items being exciting. The sweet biscuit selection was devoured in moments and the Daylesford chocolate hearts fared no better. Overall, most satisfying.

www.harrods.com

For me please

Tutto Vialla, Fattoria La Vialla £280 (above)

A huge, overflowing basket that takes at least two prop forwards to lift, the new

Tutto Vialla hamper is a thing of great beauty and, unusually for a hamper, outstanding value. La Vialla is an exceptional organic wine estate and farm in Chianti country. There are more than 40 Christmas packages from which to choose, starting at a little over £10 (for some pasta, a jar of sauce and a dishcloth) all the way up to this beauty. The list of contents is too long to itemise here, suffice to say there are ten bottles of still wine, three bottles of sparkling wine and two half-bottles of dessert wine. These fresh, accessible and unadulterated wines combine perfectly with delights such as salsa nera (chicken liver paté) and artichoke hearts in olive oil.

Other highlights include: the exquisite-sweet and fragrant pecorino, each kilogram of which requires five litres of milk from the sheep grazing in the organic, biodynamic pastures of La Vialla; the delicious finocchiona salami, a mixture of the leanest parts of meat with small pieces of grasso nobile (noble fat), flavoured with salt, whole peppercorns, garlic and fresh fennel seeds (which give the salami its name); the densely nutritious torta 'briaca (tipsy cake), bursting with almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, pine nuts, raisins, olive oil and Sangiovese with strawberries, was traditionally baked for sailors to take on long sea voyages...

The hamper contains plenty of pasta and sauces which were very well received by the junior reviewers. There are soups, purées, mousses, jam, honey; it comes with descriptions of many of the contents and even a recipe book. Far more than a hamper, this is a full induction course to la cucina Toscana. Highest recommendation; incredibly, shipping costs to the UK are included but allow at least two weeks for delivery. Best order now!

www.lavialla.it

ALSO CONSIDER

For the impecunious

The King's Ginger gift set, Berry Bros & Rudd £35

If you need a quick fix to get into someone's good books, or perhaps you are indulging in some last minute legacy-hunting, look no further. It isn't a hamper but it is a splendid treat.

The King's Ginger Truffle comprises a dark chocolate truffle centre, infused with The King's Ginger, enrobed in a double layer of Charbonnel et Walker's finest dark chocolate. This truffle has been carefully created to complement The King's Ginger and to be the perfect accompaniment to this most regal of drinks. The gift pack includes a 50cl bottle of the emphatically ginger liqueur specifically formulated by Berry Bros in 1903 for King Edward VII. What a combination! I'm sure His Majesty would have approved. Mind you, he would have liked all the hampers, too...

www.bbr.com

For the cheesy

Hampers made to order, La Fromagerie

Patricia Michelson knows cheese. She is brilliant at matching specific cheeses with an appropriate wine or spirit. La Fromagerie makes up hampers to order to individual requirements. If you or the intended recipient have a particular penchant, Patricia and her team will create a bespoke package to your budget. As well as wine, cheese and biscuits, they can include jars of chutney, fruit paste and wine jellies.

The benefit of being made to order is that it shows much thought has gone into the gift.

For example, lovers of the Savoie could opt for a High Mountain Hamper; this would include a bottle of Chignin Bergeronelle, a full-bodied grape variety descended from Roussanne which ripens in the sheltered warmth of the lower slopes of René Quenard's vineyards. It is the perfect wine to match Vacherin Mont d'Or or an aged Beaufort Chalet d'Alpage, the signature cheese of La Fromagerie.

www.lafromagerie.co.uk