



Loire Valley, France

## Sauvignon Blanc

**S**AUVIGNON BLANC is one of the most widely planted grapes from which white wines are made. It varies widely in style according to the geographical location of production. Sauvignon Blanc offers a crisp, dry, and refreshing alternative to heavier white wines such as Chardonnay. In most cases, the wines are made for immediate to intermediate consumption. I will focus on the most distinctive and best production areas and note some of my favorite producers in each.

The Sauvignon Blanc grape is indigenous to the Southwest region of France and takes its name from the French words *sauvage* (wild) and *blanc* (white). My favorite regions for this grape are Bordeaux and the Loire Valley. Many, if not most, of the famous Bordeaux châteaux produce a dry version in addition to their main red blend. The grape grows exceptionally well in the Bordeaux appellation named *Entre-deux-Mers* and offers

outstanding values. One of the greatest examples of this is *Despagne's Eclat de Sauvignon*, which is largely Sauvignon Blanc blended with smaller amounts of Semillon and Muscadelle. It is a lighter style wine but properly reflects its terroir. Cost has been under \$10 recently. Other options include *Château Marjosse Blanc* and *Château La Mothe du Barry Cuvée French Kiss*—both with more citrus notes and more body, averaging mid teen-prices.

Continuing in Bordeaux, some of the finest examples come from the First Growth wineries. These wines are never inexpensive, but all are excellent full-bodied wines and age extremely well. Three examples are *Château Margaux Pavillon Blanc* (\$300), *Château Mouton Rothschild Aile d'Argent Blanc* (\$100), and *Haut-Brion Blanc* which generally exceeds \$700.

### A PERFECT SUMMER WINE

These wines are joined by Sauternes producers led

by *Château d'Yquem's "Y"* (\$150) along with less expensive wineries which are all worth trying. I recently found an exceptional wine value in the 2019 *Château Guiraud "G"*. This dry blend of 50% Sauvignon Blanc and 50% Semillon is the perfect summer wine. It has a beautiful nose of citrus and white fruits and is well balanced on the palate. This wine is worth multiples of its \$13 price and is my white wine value discovery of the year.

In my opinion, the only place producing Sauvignon Blanc that rivals the best of Bordeaux is the Loire Valley in France. The two appellations are *Sancerre* and *Pouilly Fumé* on opposite sides of the Loire River. *Sancerre* is the more famous of the two, but the most expensive producer is in *Pouilly Fumé*. If you like wines from one appellation you will most probably like the other. My favorite producers in *Sancerre* are the cousins *Pascal* and *François Cotat*. They both produce two





Marlborough, New Zealand

of my favorite wines—Les Monts Damnés, and La Grande Côte. They are priced from \$60-80 and really reflect the attributes of the different vineyard terroir. The first one is dry and is my favorite. The rich mouthfeel is magical, and the taste sensation lingers for a minute. La Grande Côte has a small amount of residual sugar but is a memorable expression of this grape and a perfect accompaniment with the right food.

#### WHITE WINE FOOD PAIRINGS

My wife, Pat, has a recipe for Indian Shrimp Curry served on rice accompanied by toasted coconut, blond raisins, and dry roasted peanuts which is beyond believable with this wine. Another stunning combination of wine and cheese involves an appetizer of simple water crackers with a thin spread of chèvre (goat cheese) topped by a blueberry, raspberry, cherry, and a walnut half. These fresh fruits, nut, and cheese are ignited by the Sancerre. (Hint: prepare just when ready to serve to preserve the crispness of the crackers.)

On the opposite bank, the top producer of Sauvignon Blanc is Didier Dagueneau. Although

Didier died in 2008 in a tragic accident, his family continues to make outstanding wine. There is a “basic” Pouilly Fumé (Blanc) priced at around \$50 which shows the house style, but the Pur Sang is better and worth the double price.

The world’s greatest Sauvignon Blanc is Dagueneau’s Silex at \$150 or so and worth every cent. All of these wines, as well as the Sancerres, pair perfectly with Chèvre (goat cheese), as well as with soft white cheeses, crustaceans, and mussels.

#### A BEST VALUE WHITE WINE

Other noteworthy Sauvignon Blancs come from New Zealand. They generally exhibit an intense nose of tropical or citrus fruits. My favorites include Craggy Range Te Muna (\$18) which is one of the best. My all-time value white wine is a Kirkland Sauvignon Blanc (Costco) from Ti Point winery. It is owned by three women—a daughter, mother, and grandmother—who produce my favorite wine to accompany bruschetta or guacamole and chips. This wine sells for \$7 and is the best for these foods.

Other worthy examples of Sauvignon Blanc

are Veramonte (\$8) and Tabali Talinay (\$18) from Chile, and Merry Edwards (\$50), Realm Fidelio (\$70), and Orin Swift Blank Stare (\$30) from the United States. Happy Hunting!

À Votre Santé! 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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