

Divine Wine

As the seasons begin to change, Sauvignon Blanc eases the transition

BY W. PETER HOYNE

As summer turns into fall, it is nice to settle in and reminisce with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc. What makes Sauvignon Blanc so appealing is it can pique your curiosity and quench your thirst at the same time. It has a carefree personality more suited to a patio conversation than a serious dialogue at the dinner table.

Sauvignon Blanc is relatively easy to produce and is typically fermented in stainless steel tanks then bottled and consumed at a youthful age. Because of this, Sauvignon Blanc can be the driving force of a winery, sustaining its annual revenues.

Sauvignon Blanc means "wild white," and some of the finest examples of this varietal can be traced back to its origin in France's Loire Valley. The planting of vineyards in the Loire Valley can be traced back to the Romans in the first century. These wines have remained the benchmark for other producers around the world.

In the Loire Valley, Sauvignon Blanc is referred to locally as Sancerre or Pouilly-Fume and can express well-defined undertones of chalky minerals and flint. On the left bank of the Loire River are the vineyards of Sancerre, while Pouilly-Fume rests on the opposite side. Each is distinct.

Sauvignon Blanc is also cultivated in the principle appellations of Bordeaux and within Entre-Deux-Mers, Graves and Pessac-Leognan. Most notably, it provides the backbone for the sweet white elixirs of Sauternes and Barsac.

New-world interpretations of Sauvignon Blanc have originated in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Chile, Washington and throughout California.

Few wines have such a casual temperament, but Sauvignon Blanc can also have an alter ego. Affected by geography, soil and climate, it can have opposing interpretations.

The naturally occurring methoxy-pyrazine compounds in Sauvignon Blanc are easily recognized, producing herbaceous, green aromas of peas, pink grapefruit, asparagus and mowed lawn. Occasionally, these descriptors include fragrant aromas of gooseberry, lemon zest and melon.

In warmer temperatures, Sauvignon Blanc achieves greater ripeness and will express a floral, tropical identity. Grown in cool climates, this grape can have grassy notes and bracing acidity, commonly used as descriptors for



New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs.

Regardless of its aromatic attraction, Sauvignon Blanc continues to rise in popularity.

While Chardonnay remains king of the whites, Sauvignon Blanc is closing the gap and can easily be seen in the rear-view mirror. In the past year, Sauvignon Blanc sales have increased 7 percent. Consumers are becoming more conscious of higher-quality Sauvignon Blanc and more discerning as to what makes them truly happy.

Here are a few Sauvignon Blanc front-runners on my chart.

2017 Groth Sauvignon Blanc, Napa: This estate Sauvignon Blanc is co-fermented with 20 percent Semillon and is barrel fermented. A consistent over-achiever, this wine showcases Granny Smith apples, honeysuckle fruits and balanced acidity. It evolves in the glass and is for the young at heart.

2017 Gamble Ranch Sauvignon Blanc, Napa: Composed of Loire Valley and Bordeaux clones of Sauvignon Blanc, this pale yellow wine offers white melon and lemon meringue flavors that are integrated into the soft creamy edges. It is well-balanced.

2017 Kim Crawford Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand: There is no mistaking this aromatic beauty, with a vibrant, grassy bouquet with kiwi and yellow citrus. It is intoxicating, fresh and lively in the mouth. There is no mistaking this as the top performer of New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs. The Signature Reserve bottling is more rounded with tapered edges.

2017 Jayson Sauvignon Blanc, Napa: This Sauvignon Blanc reveals a sleek profile with pretty aromas of spring flowers, pink grapefruit and Meyer Lemon. It is nicely textured on the palate with a hint of peach skins.

2015 Henri Bourgeois Sancerre Les Barones, France: This Sancerre is sourced from 20- to 40-year-old vines. The medium yellow hue opens to well-integrated mineral and flinty aromas. The broad mid-palate of this wine has an intriguing stony character.