

It's hot. It is hot and it is going to stay that way for the foreseeable future. No need to stare at the TV weather forecast because it is not going to change. One source of relief for me is to enjoy a white wine with lunch or supper. From the above title you can safely assume that I would recommend a Pinot Grigio or a Pinot Gris. Pinot Grigio pairs well with light dishes that are still on the thick side, such as chicken in a cream sauce or eggplant in a spicy sauce. I have to admit that I was never that much of a fan of Pinot Grigio or Pinot Gris until I moved to South Carolina and found out how popular these two wines are, especially during the hot summer months. I became curious and decided to investigate.

One thing that bothered me was the similarity of the name of the wines. I found out that the grape for these two wines is the same, but that is where the similarity ends. Allow me to explain.

It all starts with Pinot Gris. We find that Pinot Gris is a white wine grape. Thought to be a mutant clone of the Pinot noir variety, it normally has a grayish-blue color, accounting for its name GRIS meaning "gray" in French. The wines produced from this grape also vary in color from a deep golden yellow to copper. The clone of Pinot Gris grown in Italy is known as PINOT GRIGIO.

Pinot Gris is grown around the globe with the spicy, full-bodied Alsatian and lighter-bodied, more acidic Italian styles being most often recognized. The Alsatian style, often duplicated in New World wine regions such as Marlborough, Tasmania, South Australia, Washington and Oregon, tend to have low to moderate acidity, higher alcohol levels and an almost oily texture that contributes to the full bodied nature of the wine. The flavors can range from tropical fruit to Botrytis (sweet dessert wine). In Italy, Pinot Grigio grapes are often harvested early in order to retain the refreshing acidity and minimize some of the overt fruitiness. By the way... Pinot Gris in Germany is called Rulander, after a German merchant named Johann Segur Ruland who discovered the grape growing wild in the fields of the Palantinate region in the German state of the Rhineland.

Wines made from the Pinot Gris grape vary greatly and are dependent on the wine making style of the region where they're from. Alsatian Pinot Gris are medium to full bodied wines with a rich, somewhat floral bouquet. They tend to be spicy compared to other Pinot Gris. While most Pinot Gris are meant to be consumed early, Alsatian Pinot Gris can age well. David Lett, from Eyrie Vineyards, planted the first American Pinot Gris vines in Oregon in 1965. The product met with

limited success until 1991, when the King Estate Winery was founded with a mission to produce enough high quality Oregon Pinot Gris to develop a sustainable national market for the wine. The King Estate effort was very successful.

What is called Pinot Gris in Washington and Oregon is often called Pinot Grigio in California because of the similarity in style to the wine made in Italy. There is however, a special case made for the Alsace Region in France. Pinot-gris d'Alsace is a major grape in Alsace. It consumes almost 14% of available Alsatian vineyard surface. The cool climate of Alsace and the warm volcanic soils are particularly well suited for Pinot Gris. The dry autumns allow for plenty of time for the grapes to hang on the vines, resulting in wines with very powerful flavors. I would be remiss if I did not mention Michigan. Many, many wineries in Michigan produce wines made from Pinot Gris. The contents of the bottle, depending upon the winery, are called Pinot Gris or Pinot Grigio. Both are highly accepted in Michigan with a slight edge going to Pinot Grigio. Sales are very strong with both labels.

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In this article, I just wanted to talk about another white wine you might consider for the summer. Chardonnay is always at the top of everyone's summer list. I will wager that this is so because sometimes we are lazy consumers, not willing to spend the time looking for an alternative. It appears that we have a very good alternative in Pinot Gris for many reasons. It is plentiful, it is not expensive, it can be consumed by itself or accompany a meal, and there are enough choices that you might have some fun experimenting.