

This time of year there is usually no shortage of information on the subject of White Wines – market conditions, production and distribution problems, the quality of this year's releases, etc. You get the idea. There is one category that never seems to change: how the top five or six wines finish in terms of sales and volume of wine produced. Chardonnay leads the way just ahead of Sauvignon Blanc, followed by Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio, and, finally, Pinot Blanc.

It just makes sense that Chardonnay leads the way. The Chardonnay grape is grown all over the world, on at least five different continents. It's cultivated and nourished in many different soils, and still the chardonnay grape comes through year after year with a taste that consumers like. The best overall Chardonnay for quality and price comes to us from the Chablis region of Burgundy. This is where the Standard is set. Chardonnays are then produced in other European Countries, In South Africa, Australia, South America and the US. If I could put this into a picture, it would show millions of acres of fruit controlled by many winemakers competing by style, not price, and getting their product to market.

Sauvignon Blanc is up next. This grape does very well in as many venues as Chardonnay, However, the volume is slightly less. Sauvignon Blanc is used as a drink unto itself or as a blending agent. Used alone it can be just a glass of Sauvignon Blanc, or it can be a Sancerre, which is 100% Sauvignon Blanc. It has become the benchmark white wine of New Zealand. Used as a blending agent, Sauvignon Blanc mixed with Semillon will yield some of the most famous dessert wines, notably Sauternes. This is a grape that evokes a response from consumers that ranges from a yawn to total excitement. Allow me to use Cakebread Cellars as an example. They produce a Sauvignon Blanc that is nothing less than outstanding. On the nose you experience flavors of Pink Grapefruit, Watermelon and Peach. The mouthfeel is Meyer Lemon, Lime and Guava . . . all this from a wine that used to be a yawn. Winemakers in California must have met in secret and agreed to put some excitement into their Sauvignon Blanc, because I hear more often that the Sauvignon Blancs have significantly improved. Plan on spending approximately \$26.

Up until 10 years ago I was guilty of stereotyping Gewurztraminer. I would pair it with turkey and forget about it for the remainder of the year. My mistake! I discovered that it pairs well with spicy dishes and many Asian preparations. Gewurztraminer comes to us originally from Alsace. The wines produced range from bone dry to very sweet. Alsatian production does reach the US and

is usually plentiful. Look for the Trimbach Label. Gewurztraminer is also produced in the US in Oregon, California, Washington, Michigan, New York and 24 other states. I would wager that each year production must sell out, as there are only 20,000 acres worldwide under vine. Add this to the fact that the wine is popular and you have a sellout situation.

Riesling comes to us originally from Germany, in the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer region. Riesling grapes do very well in Washington, New York, Michigan and Australia. When I think of Riesling I am reminded of the word “versatility.” You are able to do so many things with it and do them well. The grapes range in flavor from bone dry to ultra sweet. Within this range of flavor you are able to use the wine as an aperitif and a cooking aide. You can then follow by serving the wine with dinner. With dessert you could serve a late harvest Riesling or an ice wine. (Careful on the ice wine . . . big bucks).

A word about Riesling from Michigan: There are a good number of wineries on the upper peninsula that got their start with Riesling. This is due to the fact that Riesling does very well in a cool climate. By cultivating Riesling the wineries were able firmly establish themselves, accumulate some profit and put that same profit back into the winery. As I write this article, most are still in business today. Visiting these wineries is a real treat. If you find yourself in the area, please stop in.

WINESPEAK

I am going to break here and pick up again next week on the very same subject of summer white wines. There are so many others that deserve mention and I feel that they should be included. And why not? The hot weather has arrived and there is some relief to be had, relaxing on the porch with a glass of chilled white wine.

Enjoy!