

# WINE News

*Crisp, bright white wine, from the Rhineland to the islands.*



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## White Hot White

By Eric Story

Time and time again I hear the phrase, “I don’t drink white wine,” or “I only drink red.” Now, I no longer let such a statement get me riled up—but I always chuckle on the inside when I happen to hear it. I’m not sure when it happened or why it happened, but white wines do seem to carry a kind of stigma in the minds of a good many in the wine drinking public, perpetuating a misconception that they are thin, boring, lacking complexity or only good for pairing with fish (that one is my favorite). Nothing could be further from the truth.

White wines can cover an amazing range of styles, from elegant and pretty to full-bodied and rich. They can be bone dry or liquid dessert. And they can pretty much cover any aromatic wheel chart available.

Many times I have watched top professionals taste white wines in a double-blind glass, and very often they guess the wine is red. And any winemaker who grows and crafts white wines will tell you that these are often the most difficult to produce—there is no hiding defects.

To that end, a few of us who cover Loire, Alsace, Germany, Austria, Greece and Eastern Europe at K&L have put together a small sample of whites that are not only crisp and fresh, but also show an exciting range of complexity and character. These are all wines personally chosen by the authors in order to showcase not only the fantastic quality that can be had from our selection, but also the depth and range that white wines can deliver.

**2014 Claude Branger “Les Fils de Gras Mouton” Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur Lie (\$12.99)** Translated as “the son of the fat sheep,” this delicious Muscadet is made by Claude Branger, who is committed to farming his 61 acres in the heart of the Muscadet Sèvre et Maine appellation sustainably, with attention to detail that results in wines of superior quality. It is dry and fresh, with tangy, lemony citrus aromas and flavors, delicate creaminess on the mid-palate and a minerally finish. You will be surprised at the level of complexity here.



**2014 Eric Cottat Sancerre (\$18.99)** Invigorating and fresh, this 100% Sauvignon Blanc shows lemony citrus aromas and flavors accented by delicate white flowers. The palate is full and fresh, with balanced acidity and a sensation of minerality on the finish. This is a style of wine that keeps your palate fresh and alive. And though it is supremely easy to drink, the wine also shows complexity and intrigue up and down the aromatics as well as the palate. You’ll want another glass after the first one has disappeared.

**2013 Vacheron “Les Romains” Sancerre (\$46.99)** The vines here are planted on a 50-million-year-old bed of silex, and the ground is littered with ancient fossilized sea critters. This is a salty, oily and intense style of Sauvignon Blanc—arguably the benchmark for the region. Still quite young, this will improve over the next five years—or with eight hours of decanting. The domaine’s vines (Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir) are all planted on different variations and combinations of silex (mostly importantly for the wine’s character), chalk and clay.

# A Loire Affair with Chenin Blanc

By Olivia Ragni

My love affair with Chenin Blanc began years ago, when I discovered it is a grape of infinite possibilities. At its core, Chenin Blanc is a high acid, mineral-driven wine, but the rest is up for grabs, depending on terroir and climatic influences. I've had Chenin Blancs that are chubby, with notes of peach and tropical fruit, and Chenin that is so lean and mineral driven you'd think you're drinking Chablis. Planted in Loire Valley as early as the ninth century, the varietal is as diverse as the region it grows in.

Running along with Loire, the longest river in France, the Loire Valley wine region has varied soils, slopes, aspects and weather, all of which contribute to vast variations in wine style from this single grape variety.

## Vouvray

The most recognizable appellation for Chenin Blanc is Vouvray. Vouvray produces Chenin Blanc that ranges from dry to sweet and still to sparkling. The soft riverside tuffeau soil and protected south-facing slopes create ripe, full-bodied Chenin. Try the **2013 Sylvain Gaudron "La Butte du Trésor" Vouvray Sec (\$14.99)**, which delivers bright acidity balanced by opulent weight, with notes of peach skin, white nectarine and jasmine.

## Montlouis-sur-Loire

Just across the river from Vouvray sit the vineyards of Montlouis-sur-Loire. While the difference between Vouvray and Montlouis can be difficult to detect, the latter tends to be lighter-bodied, and the appellation produces less sweet wine. The **2014 François Chidaine "Les Bournais" Montlouis Sur Loire (Sec) (\$27.99)** is sourced from a single biodynamic vineyard. Aromas of honey, caramelized apples and pollen emanate from the glass. Flavors of flint, beeswax, green apple and even fresh pineapple lead to seamless structure of waxy texture and high acid that begs to age in the cellar for a few years.

## Saumur

Moving west, in the region of Saumur a unique hill is home to some of the most complex and interesting Chenin Blanc of Loire. The historic hill of Brézé sits on tuffeau limestone rock, which is thought to contribute to its character. The vineyards are divided into true "clos," or walled-off vineyards, that protect the unique topsoils. While the **2013 Château de Brézé Clos de Midi Saumur Blanc (\$18.99)** is the château's entry-level bottling, it is also a "clos" that expresses a wine from a cooler, sandy site. This is the lightest-bodied wine of this group, but

possibly one of the most complex. Aromas of fresh honeycomb and lemon zest lead to flavors of orange blossom, cooked rhubarb and wet stones. The acidity is searing and juicy and will cut through fat to cleanse the palate entirely.

## Anjou

Just west of Saumur is Anjou, a region that traditionally makes sweet Chenin Blanc, or Pineau de la Loire as it's called locally. In Coteaux du Layon the Paris Basin and the Massif Armoricain meet, creating exposed vineyards that benefit from autumn sunshine and drying winds off the Atlantic—ideal conditions for noble rot. Noble rot pierces the grape skins, concentrating the ratio of sugar to juice—making the grapes perfect for sweet dessert wine. The **2013 Pithon-Paille "4 Vents" Coteaux du Layon (\$34.99)** shows the remarkable balance the wines from this area have. Piercing high acidity coupled with 92 grams of residual sugar hardly feels sugary sweet. Flavors of honeycomb, candied orange peel and apricots make for a perfect pairing with lightly sweet fruit desserts, foie gras or blue cheese.

But Anjou is known for more than just sweet wine. Great winemakers can prevent the spread of noble rot and make beautifully concentrated dry Chenin Blanc as well. Produced from biodynamic vineyards, the **2013 Clos de l'Elu "Ephata" Anjou Blanc (\$44.99)** is a wine with dense structure and length that ensure it will age for years to come. This dry Chenin Blanc is aged in amphora for seven months, leading to a very aromatic wine with notes of smoke, white tea and honeysuckle. The palate has savory qualities of sea salt and celery with a pithy, waxy finish.

## Savennières

Finally, north of the Loire on one of the rare, very steep south-facing river banks, lies the appellation of Savennières. Vineyards here are ideally situated to provide structured, concentrated and dense Chenin Blanc worthy of sleeping in the cellar for years. If a bottle is labeled Savennières it must be dry. The **2013 Nicolas Joly Les Vieux Clos Savennières (\$36.99)** embodies the terroir of the appellation. Meyer lemon, flint, and crunchy apple burst from the glass, with flavors of almond skin, shells, resin and pears. This wine is an elegant powerhouse that will age gracefully.

Take some time to explore Loire Valley Chenin Blanc and all its many personalities, and you too, will find yourself falling head over heels for this versatile grape.





## Deciphering Difficult Dinner Duos

By Andrew Whiteley

After a long day of work, sometimes all you want to do is pick up your favorite Indian takeout or hit the newest Korean-Mexican fusion taco truck on your way home, then open a great bottle of wine. The trick here is to not break the bank, while not ruining your food choice with an ill-chosen wine (or worse, letting a fabulous wine go to waste on an ill-suited meal). Enter the Germanic white wines. Ranging from lean and mean to stunningly rich and powerful, there is a white wine to complement just about any meal.

Whether it's a delicate white fish or a spicy curry you crave, versatile Grüner Veltliner could be the answer. And if you're looking to satisfy the white wine-only drinker, but are serving a heartier meat dish, consider a powerful, aged Auslese Riesling. The possibilities are as endless as they are enticing.

### Grüner Veltliner

**2013 Högl "Wachauer Weingarten" Grüner Veltliner Federspiel Wachau (\$16.99)** A phenomenal example of the broad and textural side of Grüner. The nose is fresh and clear, while alluding to a surprising richness and breadth. Stony, unripe peaches and lemon-lime citrus notes are complemented by autolytic scents of fresh toast, delicate yeastiness, and even yogurt, which is all present on the palate, as well. These broader flavors are kept in check by the characteristic mouth-watering acid of Grüner. Completely dry, this wine is refreshing and focused, but big enough to stand up to some of the creamier, heartier dishes that you might typically reserve for a Chardonnay pairing. Try it with a Petrale sole or even something creamy like chicken Alfredo—you'll be surprised!

### Gewürztraminer

**2012 Trimbach Gewürztraminer Alsace (\$19.99)** Gewürztraminer is divisive grape. People tend to love or hate it. I'm typically in the latter category. It's often cloyingly sweet, tropically fruity, and of flabby texture. Not so with Trimbach's 2012. It is clean, dry, intense, and offers quite developed flavors for such a youthful wine. It displays a remarkable



collection of floral honeysuckle and rose petal, black and jasmine tea, vanilla, and rich, leesy aromas. The palate reflects all of those wonderful smells with the addition of savory, smoky bacon fat. The pretty melon and tropical fruits are definitely present, but take a back seat to the spice, both sweet and pungent. While it is not a crisp wine in the way a Grüner or Sauvignon Blanc might be, the acid is high enough to bring into balance the robust flavors and glycerol texture of the alcohol, which is reasonably high at 14%. This is an exceptionally enjoyable wine both on its own and with a wide array of Asian cuisine. For a Gewürz skeptic, I'm thrilled by this find.

### Riesling

#### 2014 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Trocken (Dry) (\$20.99)

Verve, vigor, spirit, enthusiasm. These are the characteristics of great dry Riesling. Dönnhoff's dry estate Riesling has verve. Introduced by a citrus and green fruit lineup of lemon, lime zest, green apples and pears, the complex nose follows up with a gorgeous floral bouquet and the sweet scent of honey. On the palate there is a strong, steely minerality and the spirit and enthusiasm are expressed in the form of high acidity. The alcohol, very low for a dry Riesling at 11.5%, is hardly noticeable except for a slight roundness it imparts to the wine, giving it extraordinary balance. This is the kind of versatile bottle that should be kept around to complement just about any meal that calls for white wine.



#### 2014 Dönnhoff Estate Riesling Nahe (\$20.99)

A beautiful example of off-dry Riesling. The increased level of sweetness compared to the Trocken Riesling highlights the delicate character and abundant fruitiness of the wine. Stone fruit comes through much more on the nose and palate than in the drier version. Vibrant freshness and ripe nectarine and peach flavors make me crave a summer salad with tart vinaigrette. The higher sugars deliver more texture than sweetness, and while it is decidedly sweeter than the Trocken, this wine too is in an exceptional state of balance. Proof positive that as long as all the components of a wine work together, differing levels of sugar can be a great thing.

#### 2001 Bollig-Lehnert Dhroner Hofberger Riesling Auslese Mosel (\$17.99)

Speaking of higher sugar levels, the 2001 Auslese Riesling from Bollig-Lehnert offers tons of it without being cloying, in large part thanks to the advancing age of the wine. Still youthful in color, but starting to show great honeyed notes and a decidedly earthy tone, this remarkable achievement makes for a classic pairing with braised meats or roasted fowl. It is rich and sweet, but also savory and powerful. If you can't quite bring yourself to take the leap of faith and serve a sweeter wine with the main dish, don't forget that the high-toned acid here also makes this wine a fabulous palate cleanser to break up multiple courses.





Vineyards of Skouras.

## Turn and Face the Not-So-Strange

By Mahon Mcgrath

A friend turned me on to the film critic Manny Farber a few years back. Farber's writing was terra incognita to me at the time, an episode of the series "Six Feet Under" that referred to his idea of "Termite vs. White Elephant" art notwithstanding. However, once I'd adjusted for the sometimes discontinuous style, I felt like I'd been waiting for someone to say those very things about film. The "new" was somehow immediately familiar: though the essays were mid-twentieth century, they drew a breath that felt fully vital, and opened out larger spaces in known cultural horizons.

While the Greek white wines that follow are obviously their own creatures, judged on sensory grounds, they represent not so much a foreign, mold-breaking hinterland as a thoroughly modern terrain far from strange. If you didn't know 'em yesterday, once met, you may feel you've known 'em all along. There is a legibility, despite their comparative obscurity, that contextualizes them among the best wines of our day, and though the vines are often ancient, indigenous varieties, the winemaking acting on them is fully aware and up-to-the-minute current.

Our first wine hails from the Peloponnese. A little north of Tripoli, Greece, a region called Fteri is home to Troupis Winery. A small scale, family run operation, the majority of their privately held vineyards are planted to the variety Moschofilero. In their hands, the wine made from these grapes, the **2014 Troupis "Fteri" Moschofilero Peloponnese (\$12.99)**, is lean, clean and subtly perfumed. There's a hint of ginger spice, but mostly the flavors and aromas tend to the sweetly floral and citric. The best analogue would probably be a bone-dry Muscat, though the Fteri is

not as obvious as all that. It is a lighter, more fugitive affair, as if the scent of lilac blooms had drifted over a fence from a neighbor's yard into yours.

The other grape Moschofilero (also called *Moscofilero*) is often said to resemble is Gewürztraminer. Though I have yet to personally encounter an example that came anywhere near the Wagnerian scale of a richer Gewürztraminer, the **2014 Skouras Moscofilero Péloponnèse (\$14.99)** does show the more luscious, effusive side of the grape's personality, but stops well shy of launching an aria. For one thing, it finishes with tongue-tingling acidity after the round body of the wine and its evocation of rose, honeysuckle, and intense, sweet, citrus aromatics. We're safely on the shore here, gazing out across the sea, as the party boat of hedonistic indulgence slowly hoots and thumps its way out of view.

For our next stop, we hop over to Santorini, where Argyros Estate crafts the indigenous varieties Assyrtiko, Athiri, and Aidani into the **2015 Argyros Estate "Atlantis" White Cyclades (\$17.99)**. Assyrtiko is the majority partner, comprising 90%, so you know immediately, if you've ever had any exposure to wines made from this grape, that you're in for a nice, sharp smack of acidity. But the Atlantis keeps that under wraps at first, leading with honeydew melon, lemon and lily notes, and a plush mouthfeel. Wait for it: the taste is really, emphatically dry. Soon, you get a little mineral grit making its presence felt, and then the citrus comes roaring back, plenty of tart lime, lying in wait. Reaching for a bottle of this in lieu of a Loire Sauvignon Blanc is not too much of a stretch.

Domaine Sigalas, also on Santorini, goes in a different direction with their **2015 Sigalas Assyrtiko Santorini (\$24.99)**. Pour me a glass blind, and I might imagine this was Riesling: honey, stone fruit, and tangerine mingle with crushed rocks on the nose, while initially ripe, peachy flavors yield in succession to dusty lemon peel, and the mild abrasion of the gravel and grit reappearing. This is dynamic, vibrant wine, of a character more often associated with chilly, more northerly vineyards than those set above the azure Aegean.

And for dessert...well, the **2014 Zafeirakis Malagouzia Thessaly (\$15.99)** does a mean interpretation of the aroma of peach pie. Beside that, there's petrol, pineapple, and a fat texture. Compared to an Assyrtiko, this is more succulent than crisp, but it finishes cleanly, with floral lift. I'm fresh out of analogies here, but I can recall any number of riper domestic whites that wished they closed as nimbly.



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