

WINE AND SPIRITS

The New Varietals

Continental is out; Mediterranean is in.

California is the most innovative wine region in the world. Though our vineyards look pastoral, they run rampant with experimentation and creativity. And if a casual poll of California's most avant-garde vintners proves prescient, this means a far more diverse vino-future.

Consider Viognier. As the decade dawned, this distinguished Northern Rhône grape with its exotic fruit flavors was barely in anyone's vocabulary. No wonder: There were a scant 85 acres of the stuff in the whole state. Now more than 1,120 acres exist, and no ambitious restaurant would be without it.

But Viognier is only the beginning. Smoky, spicy Syrah (also known as Shiraz) is experiencing such booming popularity that John

Varietal	Grape's Place of Origin	Status Here	Flavors	Food Mates
WHITE WINES				
ALBARINO	Galicia, Spain	Very obscure	Lemony and sassy	Shellfish, salads
ARNEIS	Piedmont, Italy	Obscure	Fruity, almondy, lemony	Light fish and shellfish, vegetable dishes
MARSANNE	Rhône Valley, France	Coming on strong	Apples, almonds, and spun honey	Asian dumplings, tapas
PINOT GRIGIO (same as Pinot Gris)	Probably Burgundy, France	Very hip	Lightly lemony, sometimes overlaid with a delicate creaminess	Grilled seafood, shellfish
ROUSSANNE	Rhône Valley, France	Hotter by the second	Roses, quinces, peaches	Grilled vegetables, rich fish dishes, chicken or quail
TOCAI FRIULANO	Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy	Fairly obscure	Lemony but considerably richer than Pinot Grigio	Shellfish, seafood pasta, Asian dishes
VIIGNIER	Rhône Valley, France	Already has a cult following	Honeysuckle, white melon, jasmine, rare tropical fruits	Asian dishes, anything exotic
RED WINES				
BARBERA	Piedmont, Italy	Unsung hero	Juicy boysenberries and cherries	Pasta with robust sauces
GRENACHE (known in Spain as Garnacha)	Spain	Not yet tapped	Spiced cherries	Anything grilled or roasted
MOURVÈDRE (also known as Mataro)	Possibly Southern France or Southern Spain	Popular and growing	Black fruits, smoke, black earth	Braised meat, lamb shanks
NEBBIOLO	Piedmont, Italy	Still fairly obscure	Tar, leather, violets	Roasted meat, rich pasta dishes
PETITE SYRAH (not the same grape as Syrah)	Rhône Valley, France	Has a small but fervent following	Powerful blackberries and leather; not petite	Grilled steak (perfect marriage)
SANGIOVESE	Central Italy	Definitely in	All over the board from tart cranberries to cough syrup	Anything with lots of olive oil and garlic
SYRAH	Rhône Valley, France, by way of the Middle East	Utterly chic	Spicy boysenberries, smoky and gamy	All kinds of meat

Buechsenstein, wine maker for Fife Vineyards, predicts: "Syrah is the next Merlot." Others say soon we may be as smitten with Roussanne as we once were with Chardonnay.

Behind this metamorphosis lies a broadening worldview. Wine makers and viticulturists today are as apt to find inspiration in Spain or Italy as in a neighbor's vineyard. When it comes time to plant a new vineyard (or replant one struck down by phylloxera), they ponder a much larger number of potential grape candidates. There's also been a pivotal shift in how vintners think about California. Historically, most top wineries modeled themselves after the châteaux and domaines of Continental Europe (Bordeaux and Burgundy). But dozens of wine makers now theorize that large parts of California may share more commonalities of climate and soil with the

Mediterranean. If that's the case, they say, perhaps many California vineyards are more suited to Tocai Friulano and Mourvèdre than Cabernet and Pinot Noir.

One of the biggest proponents of this idea is Randall Grahm, president and wine maker at Bonny Doon Vineyard in Santa Cruz. "The world," explains Grahm, "can be divided into two: that which is Continental and that which is Mediterranean. Continental is butter, Cary Grant, Protestant work ethic, Cabernet. Mediterranean is olive oil, Anthony Quinn, *mañana*, Grenache." Grahm posits that when you have a good fit between the grapes and the place, "then everything falls into harmony."

We bet the following wines are the ones you'll be drinking more of in the years to come.

—Karen MacNeil

Price Range	Insider Info	Top California Producers	Original Masterpiece
\$NA	Considered the most exciting white grape of Spain	No one yet; Qupé will harvest one of the first in the year 2000	Bodegas Morgadio, Rias Baixas, Galicia, about \$20
\$12 to \$18	<i>Arneis</i> means "little rascal" in Piedmontese dialect	Seghesio, Il Podere dell'Olivos	Cerreto Arneis "Blange," Piedmont, about \$18
\$10 to \$20	In France, considered a massive white of great density and power; often blended with Roussanne	Qupé, McDowell	M. Chapoutier "Chante-Alouette" Hermitage (Blanc), about \$47
\$12 to \$20	Thought to be an ancient mutation of Pinot Noir; California versions range from exceedingly light (à la Italian Pinot Grigio) to full and rich (Alsace Pinot Gris)	Byron, Flora Springs	Kuentz-Bas Tokay Pinot Gris Reserve Personelle, Alsace, about \$17
\$14 to \$20	Considered the most elegant of all the white Rhône grapes	Zaca Mesa, Wild Horse	Château Beaucastel (Blanc) Vieilles Vignes, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, about \$50
\$10 to \$16	The rage in northeast Italy	Monte Volpe, Il Podere dell'Olivos	Marco Felluga Tocai Friulano, Friuli, about \$15
\$25 and up	One of the most chic, rare French white grapes	Calera, Alban	Rene Rostaing Condrieu, about \$30 to \$40
\$17 to \$25	Originally brought to California around the time of the gold rush; now born again	Seghesio, Pepi	Luigi Coppo "Camp du Rouss" Barbera d'Asti, about \$16
Rosés: \$9 to \$13; reds: \$10 to \$28	Currently being made into top-notch rosés more often than into red wines	Rosés: Phelps "Vin du Mistral," McDowell; reds: Alban, TVine	Julian Chivite Rosado, Navarra, about \$7
\$15 to \$22	The grape that gives backbone and masculinity to many top Southern French reds	Jade Mountain, Cline	Domaine Tempier, Bandol (rouge), about \$20
\$17 to \$20	California versions aren't yet nearly as good as Italian ones	Viansa, M. Cosentino	Elio Altare Barolo, Piedmont, about \$50
\$18 to \$28	Brought to California in the last century; now probably extinct in the Rhône and grown only here	Stag's Leap Winery, Hidden Cellars "Mendocino Heritage, Eagle Point Ranch"	Go with top California producers
\$16 to \$30	One of the world's most difficult grapes, so California producers face a steep learning curve; expect this variety to improve as producers understand the grape better	Atlas Peak Reserve, Pepi "Colline di Sassi"	Ruffino Chianti Classico Ducale Riserva, about \$16
\$15 to \$30	The most successful new varietal in California	Truchard, Edmunds St. John	Jamet Côte Rotie, Rhône, about \$40