

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

November 2015

CLASS C4 – OTHER DRY WHITE

(Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc)

Old World Style vs. New World Style

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THIS FLIGHT

The wines in this month's flight were chosen to highlight the varietal characteristics and differences between Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc, with particular attention to Old World and New World styles of producing these wines. So as you judge you should be able to identify New World Sauvignon Blanc and Old World Sauvignon Blanc and New World Chenin Blanc from Old World Chenin Blanc. The quality of wines have been chosen to range from high silver/gold all the way through to non-medal wines including a faulty wine.

AFTER READING THESE NOTES YOU SHOULD KNOW:

1. BCAWA's definition of "Class C4 - Other Dry White";
2. Which region of France is known for growing top quality Sauvignon Blanc;
3. Which region of France is known for growing top quality Chenin Blanc;
4. Which wine growing region is a leader in producing New World style of Sauvignon Blanc;
5. Which wine growing region is a leader in producing New World style of Chenin Blanc;
6. How Sauvignon Blanc produced in Marlborough differs from the Loire Valley;
7. Differences most often used to differentiate Old World and New World styles;
8. Distinct aromas and flavours used to identify each varietal.

BCAWA DEFINITION: Class C4 - Other Dry White

This class contains all other white wines, either varietals or blends, which do not fit the descriptions of Classes C1 (Chardonnay), C5 (White Pinot), or C2 (Aromatic White Vinifera). A white wine to be consumed with food.

Varietal vinifera wines in this class must contain 85% or more of vinifera varieties such as Auxerrois, Chasselas, Chenin Blanc, Colombard, Grüner Veltliner, Madeleine Angevine, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, or Trebbiano. The remaining 15% may be any ingredient. Blends in this class must not fit the definitions of C1, C5, or C2. Wines that include interspecific hybrid grapes are acceptable in this class and their ingredient percentages must be specified so their eligibility in the appropriate AWC class can be determined.

Aromatic white grape varieties are acceptable in blends provided their impact is subdued. Non-grape dry white table wines belong in either this class or J1 (Country Table).

Technical Characteristics:

Alcohol: 9% - 13.5%.
Colour: Pale bronze or bronze-pink to pale straw to light gold. No amber, brown or grey tinges.
Sugar: 0.0% - 1.5%.
Specific Gravity: 0.990 - 0.998.
Acidity: 6.0g/L - 7.5g/L.
pH: 3.0 - 3.7.

SAUVIGNON BLANC - Old World Style (France)

Info on grape – Sauvignon Blanc is one of the 7 noble grape varieties. It's responsible for some of the most aromatic dry white wines in the world, famously produced in the Loire Valley in Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé.

Where it's from – In Bordeaux, Sauvignon Blanc is the one exception to the generalization that all Bordeaux wines are blends, though many consider the Loire to produce the purest, unadulterated representation.

World-class Sauvignon Blanc's is produced in the upper Loire, particularly from Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé. The best examples are drier, denser and slower maturing than most New World Sauvignon Blanc, and genuinely express terroir with nuances dependent on the proportion of gravel and flint in the soil.

For the value conscious consumer, some of France's best-value Sauvignon Blanc is made in the Loire's less famous appellations. Sauvignon from the Touraine appellation can be great, as often as Sancerre or Pouilly Fumé. Look for Sauvignon Blanc from three small appellations just west of Sancerre – Menetou-Salon, Reuilly and Quincy.

Terroir – Limestone, chalky, well-drained stony vineyards of Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé produce a light, steely, racy aromatic white wine.

History of Wine - In 1997 DNA profiling established that Sauvignon Blanc along with Cabernet Franc were the parents of Cabernet Sauvignon.

Techniques in Production – Sauvignon Blanc vines are very vigorous. If they get out of hand, the grapes don't reach full maturity, which leaves the wine too herbaceous. Generally Sauvignon Blanc is vinified in a way that avoids accentuating any excessive herbaceous character. Fermentation temperatures are not too low, and fermentation may take place in old oak. The result is a more restrained style of wine than those produced in New Zealand.

Typical aromas and flavours – Typically Sauvignon Blanc has a pronounced aromatic intensity that includes grassy, herbaceous, green fruits, gooseberries and nettles.

Relevant Facts - Almost all unblended, unoaked Sauvignon Blanc is meant to be enjoyed when it's young. The wines are in general designed to be drunk as young as possible, although some of the fruit from particularly low-yielding vineyards can be concentrated to withstand oak ageing and may need a year or so in bottle before showing their best.

SAUVIGNON BLANC - New World Style (New Zealand)

Info on grape - Sauvignon Blanc is the variety that established New Zealand's international reputation and accounts for just over 50% of all plantings.

Terroir – Cool to moderate temperatures, intense sunshine and large diurnal range (the variation in temperature between highs and lows during the day) allow grapes in New Zealand to reach high levels of sugar ripeness while retaining acidity and fresh, intense aromatic flavours.

History of Wine - New Zealand has a cool Maritime climate very similar to Bordeaux. They credit missionaries with the first plantings, and Reverend Samuel Marsden for producing the first wine in the region.

Techniques in Production – Extremely vigorous Sauvignon Blanc vines love the dry gravels of Marlborough's Wairau Valley. The success of Sauvignon Blanc in New Zealand is due in part to the widespread adoption of canopy management strategies that brought its excessive vine vigor under control. The youthfulness of the industry has produced a very modern mind set towards hygiene, temperature control, anaerobic winemaking and screw caps. (90% of N.Z. wines are closed this way)

Typical aromas and flavours – Intense aromas of capsicum and gooseberry with herbal notes, passion fruit, tomato, a stony minerality and occasionally hints of creamy oak. Better wines are capable of developing asparagus notes with bottle age. N.Z. style is pungent and intensely perfumed with obvious fruitiness a hint of gas and sweetness. A style that is now found in Chile, South Africa and cooler areas of North America

Relevant Facts – New Zealand grows the world's most southerly grapes. Marlborough is possibly the world's, Sauvignon capital right now, though producers in the Casablanca Valley may do the same for Chile.

Cloudy Bay is probably the most famous producer, but over the years countless others have popped up. The N.Z. wine industry realizes that there is a risk that all their Sauvignon Blanc could be seen as identical, and have started promoting stylistic variations from region to region and in many sub regions of Marlborough.

New Zealand has been so successful with its pungently herbaceous style of Sauvignon Blanc with the tropical fruit aromas characteristic of a cool, prolonged fermentation that winemakers throughout the New World, especially in Chile and South Africa are producing in a similar fashion.

CHENIN BLANC - Old World Style (Loire Valley)

Info on grape – Chenin Blanc is used to produce dry, sweet, still and sparkling wines. In recent years there has been a move to seek fuller ripeness even for dry wines, balancing higher alcohol with lower acidities leaving a few grams of residual sugar to add weight.

Barely ripe fruit, generally between 10-11% ABV is used for sparkling wines

Where it's from – Chenin Blanc is responsible for the great white wines of Touraine and Anjou-Saumur in the Loire Valley. Chenin Blanc from the Loire Valley can be incredibly long-lived and often with a unique botrytis flavour. Chenin Blanc is notably high in acidity, which is brilliant in a warm climate situation but has presented many difficulties in the Loire's coolest vintages.

Coteaux du Layon and Vouvray are two great appellations for consistently great Chenin Blanc. Production is typically slow fermentation in large old oak or stainless steel, no malolactic fermentation. There are fine dry (Sec) Loire Chenin Blancs too, most famously Savennières, a tiny appellation famous for making wines that take a decade to be approachable full of minerality that is excellent for pairing with strong, flavorful foods.

Terroir - Great Chenin Blanc comes from hazy autumn days on the limestone and schist soils of the Loire. Prolonged autumn encourages noble rot and produces a toasty golden wine with all the complexity of any botrytized wine. With global warming, overly cool vintages are becoming a rarity in the Loire, and growers have been able to use less sulphur to stabilize their wines.

Techniques in Production - One peculiarity of Chenin Blanc is that even within one bunch it is common for grapes to reach different levels of ripeness. This results in leafy aromas if care isn't taken to exclude unripe grapes, so the best producers usually pick in successive tries. Dry, medium and sweets styles are made from these grapes, including those dried in the sun (passerillage) and those affected by noble rot.

Typical aromas and flavours - Young Chenin Blanc wines have flavours of fresh apple through to exotic fruit, depending on ripeness of grapes. Can also express smoky mineral notes or the orange marmalade-like influence of botrytis. These wines become richer, round and more honeyed with age. High levels of sugar can become so fully integrated into the wines that the sweetness becomes almost undetectable.

Relevant Facts - Because of natural acidity Chenin Blanc ages well, though the move toward harvesting at full ripeness is tending to produce richer, more complex wines that should be consumed in the first 10 years.

CHENIN BLANC - New World Style (South Africa)

Info on grape – This is the most planted grape in South Africa and is known locally as Steen. Winemakers in South Africa also use Chenin Blanc to make every style of white wine.

Terroir – Cape soils tend to be excessively acid and require heavy lime amendments, tartaric acid adjustments to musts and wines, as well as severe tartrate removal procedures before bottling. Climates and soils vary as dramatically as the landscape, with mountains rearing out of the sea and unfolding into valleys and dry lands. In the Stellenbosch district located outside Cape Town, there are more than 50 soil types.

The exceptional versatility of South African Chenin Blanc is due to the Cape Wine lands' incredibly diverse terroir that produces this great variety of styles. The most intensely flavoured Chenin Blanc wines come from older vines that have been carefully managed for balanced yields.

While most South African Chenin Blanc are still made in a fresh and fruity style, that is changing as more producers focus on mature bush vines. They are pruning dramatically to cut down on yields, and picking the grapes riper and often introducing oak fermentation and maturation.

History of Wine – South Africa's CBA (Chenin Blanc Association) is currently trying to change the way they classify their wines in an effort to help customers identify the key sensory and chemical features of the various styles which range from 'fresh and fruity' to 'rich and ripe' to 'sweet.'

Techniques in Production – most producers use French oak for reds and whites. Controlled MLF is widely practiced while producers have reduced their dependence on filtration and stabilization processes in an effort to preserve flavour and fruitiness. Barrel fermentation and barrel ageing are also widely used to contribute extra body and toasty oak flavours.

Typical aromas and flavours – Young Chenin Blanc shows fresh fruit and delicate floral aromas and a host of fruit salad flavours including apple, melon, apricot, guava and pineapple, all backed by firm, crisp, natural acidity that bring these wines into balance.

Relevant Facts - Oak is often used to introduce a complexity of flavours and a richer mouth feel. Chenin Blanc is capable of lengthy bottle maturation where the colour deepens to a gorgeous straw-gold, and honey and nuts are added to the palette of flavours. The South African style of Chenin Blanc is consistently showing what the winemakers are investing into their vineyards and production styles.

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