

Wine Connoisseur

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Photography by Marty Snortum Studio



THE SUMMER'S BEST WINES

Ah, Summer! It's time to lean back, close your eyes, put your feet up and dream of far away places with strange-sounding names.

The warm days and cool evenings are perfect for enjoying casual dining and entertaining, and with this change of cuisine comes a change in wine selection. I'll begin by explaining what makes "summer wines" so appealing. It's all about the acidity; the same reason lemonade is so satisfying this time of year. The young, light, white wines and light to medium-bodied reds that are crisp and more acidic will pair well with warm weather dishes.

Let's explore some "best of class" wines that will enhance your summer meals. As always, I recommend you choose wines based on your menu.

For your appetizers, such as grilled vegetables or cheeses, you might try a light Italian wine such as Pino Grigio. This wine has summer written all over it. There are also some very good, inexpensive releases currently on the market, such as Ritratti (2000) and Le Vigne di Zamo (2000).

For your salad course, choose a white wine, keeping in mind the salad dressing you use will definitely affect the taste of the wine.

An entrée including light fish, such as sole or halibut, requires a more complex and fruity style wine; Sauvignon Blanc would be ideal. A Riesling would also do well here. Avoid the

heavy, oak-aged wines, such as Chardonnay.

For the all-American summer barbeque you have a wider range of choices. With ribs, steaks, chicken, and hamburgers go for the bolder, heavier reds such as Zinfandel or Shiraz. The Shiraz available from Australia or New Zealand is a great value, and releases blended with Cabernet or Grenache grapes are especially delicious.

If you're just kicking back in the yard in your favorite lawn chair to watch the spectacular Southwestern sunset and munch on a sandwich, pour a glass of chilled German Gewurztraminer or a dry Riesling.

I would be remiss if I did not caution you about wine storage as the weather gets warmer. Wine does not care if you store it in a \$10,000.00 custom wine cellar or between the shoes in your closet. What is

important is that the temperature should remain as constant as possible. The normal wine cellar temperature range is between 55 and 59. Storing the wine at a consistently higher temperature will accelerate the aging process. Couldn't this be a good thing? Possibly, but forcing wine to age too quickly will result in a sharp,



exaggerated curve of awkward development, followed by a dramatic deterioration. Simply put, enjoy your wine as the winemaker intended, and avoid extreme temperature changes.

To assist you in selecting the perfect wines, not only for summer but also for the entire year, here are my picks for "Best of Class" this year. As always, I choose these wines based on my quality/price criteria index and local availability, and remember - wine preferences are personal, and tastes vary. These suggestions are just that - suggestions. Yes, there are more expensive and better wines out there, but like I've always said, when it comes to wine, price and quality have little to do with each other. 🍷

Editor's Note: All cheeses and most wines featured in this article can be found at The Greenery Market

White Wine

Casa Lapostolle Sauvignon Blanc 2001, Chile

Excellent citrus, herbs and fruity aromas. Strong body with a long finish. (\$12)

Brancott "Reserve" Sauvignon Blanc 2001, New Zealand

An excellent summer wine. Crisp acidity with flavors of lime and apple with some herb overtones. An excellent pair with grilled fish or shrimp. (\$12)

Chateau Souverain Chardonnay 2002, Sonoma County, California

Released in April 2004, this highly rated Chardonnay is buttery smooth with aromas of pear and citrus. A long finish leaves lingering flavors of pear and cinnamon spice. (\$14)

Fox Run Riesling 2002, Finger Lakes, New York State

A surprise from a producer in upstate New York. This dry, light Riesling has notes of peach, lime and floral. The finish is fresh, and when chilled, is perfect for that unquenchable summer thirst. (\$10)

Chateau St. Jean Fume Blanc Sonoma County 2002, Sonoma County, California

Flavors of vanilla, fig and melon with a lemony acidity make this wine a great complement to most summer meals. It has a slight oak finish that does not overcome the flavors inherent in this Fume Blanc. (\$13)



Red Wine

Rancho Zabaco Dancing Bull Zinfandel 2001, Healdsburg, California

One of the great buys of the last few years. This Zin is lively, with raspberry and black cherry fruit. The soft finish is reminiscent of a merlot, except for the slight hint of black pepper. This pairs with pizza or beef kabobs from the grill. (\$10)

Sterling Merlot Napa Valley 1999 or 2000, Napa Valley California

"Wow" is the best description for this merlot! Deep purple in color, with blackberry jam flavor, this wine has a long, full, rich finish with hints of cinnamon, nutmeg and cedar. (\$18)

Cline Red Truck 2002, Sonoma, California

A blend of Mourvedre, Syrah, Merlot, and Pinot Noir, this wine is a pleasure to drink. Produced by one of the premier wineries in Sonoma, it's a bold mixture of excellent varietals, resulting in red cherry, blueberry and chocolate flavors. (\$10)

Alice White Cabernet/Shiraz 2002, South Eastern Australia

Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz (Syrah) has been blended for many years. This is a 50/50 blend that works. The artful blend of the vibrant fruit of the Shiraz and the elegance of the Cabernet result in a bold and full-bodied wine. The deep color and long finish will go well with summer pastas and cheeses. (\$6)

Seghesio Zinfandel Sonoma County 2002, Sonoma County, California

Released in March, 2004. The 2002 harvest for California Zinfandel was good. As a result, Seghesio has produced an outstanding wine with aromas of ripe fruit with a full-bodied, silky texture. If you like Zinfandel, you'll love this one.



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