

DOWNTIME

Vino 101 – Round 2

by James Dunne

Welcome back for Round 2 in our series of tips and tricks to understating wine, beer and spirits. These hints will boost your confidence when buying a bottle to entertain clients, take to an event or give as a gift.

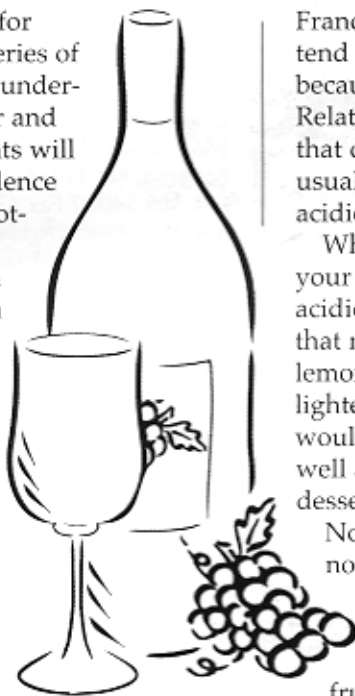
We began this series talking about the Chardonnay grape. Now we will move on to another popular white grape, Sauvignon Blanc.

It is important to understand some basic distinctions between grape types (aka 'varietals'). More importantly, it is vital to practice. Once you learn about a grape, go out and buy a couple of bottles of that style of wine. Get at least two different brands of a grape type so you can compare them. This way, you'll better understand a flavor when you sample two side by side.

Re-cork the leftovers and put them in the fridge. They should be fine for a while; you will be able to taste them for at about 5 days.

Sauvignon Blanc ("so-veen-yawn blanh") is not traditionally fermented in or aged in oak barrels. Therefore, you should expect lighter and crisper wines that are usually acidic. Acidity is the tartness you feel on the sides of your tongue when you taste wines such as Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Riesling and other light whites. It's similar to biting into a lemon or green apple; no oak flavor or aroma.

The Sauvignon Blanc grape usually grows best in cooler regions, such as northern California, northern



France and Germany. These regions tend to yield the more acidic grapes because there is less year-round sun. Relate it to a garden-grown tomato that doesn't get enough sun. It is usually green (unripe) and more acidic.

What bearing does this have on your meal? You would select an acidic wine to compliment a meal that needs acid: like squeezing a lemon on seafood, chicken or other lighter cuisines. Sauvignon Blanc would go perfectly with these, as well as with a salad or any tart dessert.

Not only does this grape itself normally yield lighter bodied acidic wines than Chardonnay, but the lack of oak aging results in a more fruity flavor without the distinctive oak aroma and character.

One case where the Sauvignon Blanc grape is fermented in oak is the Fumé Blanc. This is actually not a grape varietal. It was created, by Robert Mondavi some 30 years ago when he re-labeled his excess Sauvignon Blanc and promoted it in the U.S. as a 'new' creation.

The American public bought into it and cleared the shelves for Mondavi. Since then, to distinguish Fumé Blanc from a traditionally styled Sauvignon Blanc, vineyards age these creations in oak, giving them a fuller body along with the oak aroma and flavor. This is essentially the only difference between the two types of wine.

You can often tell the difference by their color and body. Sauvignon Blancs are usually lighter, often with a more pale hue. Fumé Blancs usually have a darker hue, with the wine appearing thicker. "Legs" drip down the sides of the glass after swirling, versus a Sauvignon Blanc where they usually "sheet" down or drip faster.



James Dunne is president of Vino U., a wine education program for individuals, groups and corporate events. To learn more log on to www.VinoU.com

Sauvignon Blancs earned their reputation from their origins in Germany and France and later California, New Zealand, South Africa and here on Long Island. When you set out to buy a French bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, the label likely will not say the words Sauvignon Blanc, but rather *Sancerre* or *Pouilly-Fumé*. These are 100% Sauvignon Blanc or a blended wine with a predominance of the Sauvignon Blanc grape in them.

When ordering a Sauvignon Blanc (aka Fumé Blanc, Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé), expect something simple, dry and acidic – often with flavors of fig, lemon, lime, grapefruit, herbal, fresh cut grass, bell pepper and mineral. These wines should be enjoyed sooner rather than later. Sauvignon Blanc is generally *not* meant to be aged and should be consumed within two years of being released.

Cheers.