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33 Stupendous Sauvignon Blancs

Our favorite best-in-class bottles
for summer sipping

By Ray Isle

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NOT LONG AGO, we sent out a survey to F&W readers and asked what their favorite white wine was. Generally, if you send out a poll with that question, the answers come in, the gears whir, and the vast machinery spits out an answer: Chardonnay. It's been the most popular white wine variety in the U.S. for decades. However, F&W readers—a far-sighted, original bunch to be sure—beg to differ. Your fave white grape? It's Sauvignon Blanc.

And why not? Sauvignon Blanc is zingy and fresh; it does the jitterbug while Chardonnay is doing the waltz. In some places, New Zealand particularly, it takes on notes of cut grass and bell peppers (loved by many, loathed by some); in other places, it's flinty and austere; elsewhere, it mellows into melon or mango notes. Always, it suggests citrus of one form or another—grapefruit, lemon, lime. It's rarely aged in oak (though it can be) and rarely rich in style (though it can be). Done well, it's got a kind of finger-snap zip that wakes up your palate, one reason that it's also so good as an aperitif.

Almost every wine-producing country grows Sauvignon Blanc, though not necessarily all of them should—it isn't a grape that does well in super-warm climates, where it loses its hallmark acidity and ends up pudgy in a weird way. But there are plenty of places where it does brilliantly, from New Zealand to California to Chile. Some are surprising—Austria's Styria, for example—and some are utterly classic, like France's Loire Valley, home to the Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé appellations. So here, F&W Sauvignon fans, are 33 of the best.



FRANCE

France's most famed Sauvignon Blanc region is undoubtedly Sancerre, which appears on by-the-glass lists in what often seems like every restaurant in the U.S. But the variety is planted throughout the Loire Valley in appellations as well-known as Pouilly-Fumé and as little-known (here, at least) as Menetou-Salon or Coteaux du Giennois. But don't overlook the white wines of Bordeaux, either—here, Sauvignon is often blended with a percentage of Sémillon and aged in oak barrels, making for richer, more golden-fruited white wines.

2022 CHÂTEAU BONNET SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$16)

Like many Bordeaux blancs, this zesty white blends Sauvignon Blanc with some Sémillon. It's appealingly direct, with a lemon-gumdrop character and bright finish.

2021 ALICE BERTHIER COTEAUX DU GIENNOIS VINS DE LOIRE (\$24)

Sourced by importer Mary Taylor Wine, this pear- and lime-scented Sauvignon is from Coteaux du Giennois, north of Sancerre.

2022 DOMAINE DU NOZAY SANCERRE (\$38)

Biodynamically grown grapes go into this floral, citrus-creamy Sancerre from vignerons Philippe and Marie-Hélène de Benoist, longtime organic growers.

2022 CHÂTEAU DE FONTAINE-AUDON SANCERRE (\$30)

A single-estate wine from a 37-acre vineyard grown on flinty soils, this crisp white has an alluringly silky texture, with flavors of Ruby Red grapefruit and guava.

2022 DOMAINE FRANCIS BLANCHET POUILLY-FUMÉ VIEILLES VIGNES (\$30)

Wildflower honey lurks in the aroma of this old-vine Fumé. It's made in a richer style for Sancerre, full of compelling hay and sweet citrus notes.

2022 DOMAINE DELAPORTE SANCERRE CHAVIGNOL (\$43)

The Delaporte family has been making wine in Sancerre since the 1600s. Their elegant flagship white recalls Bosc pears and lemon.

2018 CHÂTEAU LA LOUVIÈRE PESSAC-LÉOGNAN WHITE (\$50)

This 100% Sauvignon Blanc from Bordeaux's Pessac-Léognan suggests lemongrass and vanilla; aging in 30% new oak brings richness.

2022 DOMAINE VACHERON SANCERRE BLANC (\$53)

Complex layers of citrus, green apple, and melon play here, ending on a peppery note; this wine is a benchmark for your Sancerre education.



NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand rocketed into worldwide awareness for its distinctive Sauvignon Blancs in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and today, the variety represents about three-quarters of the wine made here and 86% of what's exported. In early years, the style—herbal and tart—was sometimes pushed to extremes, edging toward jalapeño notes in some cases. Today, most producers have pulled back a bit on pyrazine levels (pyrazines are compounds in grape skins that can give herbaceous notes to a wine), without sacrificing true New Zealand character.

2023 ARONA SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$14)

There's a lot of grapefruit zest here in both scent and flavor, underpinned by hints of flint and cracked pepper. It would go great with oysters on the half shell by the ocean, but if you don't have an ocean handy, a pool would work excellently, too.

2023 MOUNT RILEY LIMITED RELEASE MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$17)

Mount Riley's limited-release bottling draws on grapes from the Buchanan family's best parcels. It's classically New Zealand: grassy and peppery (but fragrant, not piercing), with ripe grapefruit flavors.

2023 OTU MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$19)

Otu's estate is in the Awatere Valley, about a mile from the coast. The wind off the Cook Strait gives its wines a floral aspect, which combines with classic grass and citrus notes for a more subtle New Zealand character.

2023 ALLAN SCOTT MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$20)

Love passion fruit? This is your wine: It's tart and zippy, with green apple and boxwood in the mix. There's a classic herbaceousness and bright acidity—it'd be great as an aperitif paired with goat cheese rolled in fresh herbs.

2023 FORREST MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$22)

An aroma that recalls a just-cut summer lawn and tart pink grapefruit flavors makes this affordable Sauvignon a great warm-weather pour. The Forrest family also makes a low-alcohol version (9.5%) worth checking out.

2023 DOG POINT MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$25)

Dog Point makes some of Marlborough's best Sauvignons. With a hit of struck match in the aromas and citrus flavors, it recalls French Sauvignons like those of Pouilly-Fumé while at the same time remaining deeply New Zealand.

2023 SMITH & SHETH CRU WAIRAU SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$25)

Master of Wine Steve Smith gained fame as cofounder of Craggy Range before starting Smith & Sheth. This juicy white glides past the country's grassy style to concentrate on vivid grapefruit and passion fruit flavors.

2023 CRAGGY RANGE TE MUNA MARTINBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$26)

Sauvignons from Martinborough, on New Zealand's north island, tend to have fewer green notes than those of the south island. This bottling mingles grapefruit and melon flavors with a brisk, stony finish.

2022 GREYWACKE MARLBOROUGH WILD SAUVIGNON (\$31)

"Greywacke" refers to the type of bedrock in the vineyards that winemaker Kevin Judd farms; "wild" refers to his use of native yeasts for fermentation. It's a gorgeous white—flinty and smoky, with lots of creamy citrus fruit and a supple, rounded texture.



CALIFORNIA

California Sauvignon Blanc comes from all over the state, though there are a modest number of vines compared to, say, Chardonnay. (Four tons of Chardonnay are crushed for every one of Sauvignon Blanc.) Generally speaking, California's benevolent climate pushes Sauvignon toward a more rounded, often melony character; grassy and peppery notes are less common here. A number of producers give their Sauvignons a percentage of oak-barrel aging; Robert Mondavi coined the term Fumé Blanc for the style back in 1968, a nod to the Pouilly-Fumés of the Loire Valley. Although prices for California Sauvignon Blancs have risen in recent years, there are still superb renditions out there that won't break the bank.

2022 HANNA RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$20)

Hanna winemaker Jeff Hinchliffe blends fruit from 10 different vineyards for this bottling. It's an appealingly pure expression of Russian River Valley Sauvignon, its flavors suggesting pomelos and apples.

2022 MASSICAN SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$33)

Based in Napa Valley, Massican takes inspiration from northern Italy. This wine channels the savory Sauvignons of Friuli through California's climate to yield a tart white with Meyer lemon and lemongrass.

2021 CAKEBREAD CELLARS NAPA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$36)

Aging in older oak barrels allows this lemon verberna-scented Sauvignon to achieve a creamy texture without taking on any oak notes. The flavors suggest lemon and mango and linger appealingly.

2022 MERRY EDWARDS RUSSIAN RIVER VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$48)

Richer in style with a touch of oak, this is a Sauvignon Blanc for Chardonnay lovers. While Merry Edwards is known for Pinot Noirs, this wine has been a mainstay since 2001.

2023 HONIG NAPA COUNTY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$24)

The Honig family made Sauvignon Blanc their focus in 1980, when almost no one else was making or buying it. Today, their Sauvignons, such as this citrus blossom-scented wine, are among California's best.

2022 TALLEY VINEYARDS SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$34)

Known for its single-vineyard Chardonnays and Pinots, Talley's sole Sauvignon Blanc is a winner, too. It's medium-bodied and pineapple-melony, with refreshing, zippy acidity.

2022 SPOTTSWOOD SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$45)

Spottswode is a benchmark Cabernet producer in Napa Valley, but the winery's Sauvignon Blanc has almost equal acclaim. It offers great purity of flavor, mingling citrus and tree fruits, with a long, grapefruit-zesty finish.

2022 LAIL BLUEPRINT SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$60)

Robin Lail's Georgia bottling is arguably California's best Sauvignon Blanc—stellar, but pricey (\$170). Her Blueprint shares similar complexity for less. (Plus, 10% of online Blueprint sales go to organizations fighting climate change.)

THE REST OF THE WORLD

Sauvignon Blanc grows throughout the wine world. Some places have become familiar over time—Chile has long been a source for cool-climate, coastal Sauvignons, which channel some of the grassy, herbaceous freshness of the variety; northern Italy, particularly Friuli, offers precise, stony versions. Less familiar to U.S. drinkers are the terrific Sauvignons of Austria's Styria region. They're some of the best in the world and are well worth seeking out.

2023 LOS VASCOS COLCHAGUA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$15)

This wine, from the Chilean arm of France's Domaines Barons de Rothschild Lafite, leans more toward the variety's lime and grapefruit side, with lively flavors and a vivid finish.

2022 TEMENT KALK & KREIDE SÜDSTEIERMARK SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$26)

This perfumed Austrian wine blends grapes from 55 biodynamic vineyard parcels. It's tingy and chalky, with citrus notes and a hint of crunchy green papaya flavor.

2021 MONTES LIMITED SELECTION LEYDA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$15)

People who love New Zealand Sauvignon will take to this cool-climate Chilean white immediately. It's distinctive and grassy, and the tangy finish lasts and lasts.

2022 RUSSIZ SUPERIORE COLLIO SAUVIGNON (\$35)

Northern Italy makes some of the world's top Sauvignons, primarily from the hillside vineyards of Friuli. This one from vintner Marco Felluga is full of fresh citrus and lime zest, with a mineral finish.

2022 LAPOSTOLLE GRAND SELECTION SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$20)

Lapostolle is one of Chile's benchmark wineries, producing impressive wines ranging in price. This Sauvignon is a definite bargain, full of melon and lime notes, appealing and juicy.

2021 SATTLERHOF GAMLITZ SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$36)

This aromatic cuvée is named for the Sattler family's hometown, Gamlitz, where their vineyards are planted. With lime blossom and honey and a stony finish, it's an Austrian Sauvignon to seek out.

2022 CANTINA PUIATTI SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$25)

No oak and fermentation solely with native yeasts results in a very pure expression of Sauvignon from this Friulian producer. Flavors of melon and citrus mingle with a lightly herbal tomato leaf character.

2022 VON WINNING LIME RIFT SAUVIGNON BLANC (\$29)

This German wine recalls herbs and pineapple oil (if there is such a thing). It made me think of a brass band on a summer day—possibly too far a metaphorical leap, but I'll stand by it.