



CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING FOR WINE VARIETIES OUTSIDE OF THE AVERAGE PINOT GRIGIO AND MERLOT, EXPERTS SAY.

Grapes of Wine

BY BETH DEMMON

Wine experts weigh in on trending varietals and why they matter on menus.

IN TODAY'S TREND-DRIVEN LANDSCAPE, even occasional wine drinkers grow weary of the predictable varietals like Pinot Grigio and Merlot that have been widely available on restaurant menus for years. This overabundance of tradition has led to lingering fads (think rosés), but demand for seasonal alternatives is growing.

"I think that there is a diverse array of wines that are trending right now, perhaps more than there ever has been. Riesling and Chardonnay have been experiencing a renaissance, and Viognier and Southern Rhône blends seem to be doing very well right now," says David Paterson, general manager and winemaker at Tantalus Vineyards in British Columbia.

In an age of Instagram, food and drink experts are constantly seeking out the "next new thing" to stay ahead of the curve. Wine is no exception. Under-the-radar wine regions are surging in popu-

larity, and with them grape varietals that the layperson may not be familiar with. Even dominant wine regions like Italy, Spain, and Australia are beginning to experiment with different grapes.

Haunah Klein, head sommelier at Boulud Sud restaurant in the JW Marriott Marquis in Miami, confirms this shift. "In Miami, we are seeing a lot of crisp, bright, zippy wines moving: wines like Txakolina from Spain [and] Falanghina from Campania. Lighter style reds are also on the move—Gamay from Beaujolais and Nerello Mascalese from Sicily. Wine varietals from lesser-known regions have been showing up on wine lists ... and are versatile when it comes to food pairing," she says.

Summer drinking will always be dom-



SIPS APPEAL

**Draxton Wines
2017 Pinot
Meunier Rosé**

Adding interesting attributes to the traditional methode Champenoise, Pinot Meunier grapes were an easy choice for Mike Draxton, president and winemaker. It was the quality of the grapes from this particular vineyard that prompted him to make the rosé, he says, which involved the juice being extracted off the skins within 24 hours, then fermented in at a cool temperature. The result is a wine bursting with strawberry notes that pairs well with salmon and brie.

**HEALDSBURG
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inated by light and bright wines, but a fresh twist in fall months may be a boon to beverage directors. “I believe the Gran Moraine Rosé [from Oregon’s Willamette Valley] can compete with the wines of Provence and offer a New-World alternative that might be more approachable to a guest that is looking to discover rosé,” says Lisa Redwine, Advanced Sommelier and sales representative for Regal Wine Company. For pairing with menu items, she recommends the Cenyth’s rosé from California’s Sonoma County as an interesting addition to a restaurant’s wines-by-the-glass offerings.

When it comes to new grapes, Brandy Compton, beverage director for Austin, Texas, restaurant The Brewer’s Table, has a few in mind. “Hondarrabi Beltza is a red grape variety used to make wines in the Getaria Txakoli DO in the Spanish Basque country that is most closely related to Cabernet Franc. The wines being made with these grapes that you will see most frequently here in the U.S. are Txakoli rosés,” she says. “They are beautiful expressions of the Basque region [and] amazing food wines ... slightly effervescent with bright acidity and balanced minerality.”

Gino Ferraro, owner of Ferraro’s Italian Restaurant & Wine Bar in Las Vegas, has another suggestion. “The up-and-coming Italian grape of the moment is the Nerello Mascalese. It’s indigenous to the slopes of Mount Etna in Sicily. It’s come to be regarded as the fourth royal Italian grape, alongside Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, and Aglianico.” Of course, an Italian grape pairs well with pasta, but Ferraro also lists seafood and eggplant as excellent dishes to bring out the best flavor.

Klein from Boulud Sud Miami agrees with the common sentiment of what grows together goes together, noting her preference to keep regional grape varieties alongside its local cuisine. “It gives the pairing a sense of place,” she says. “The racy, salty character of the whites are perfect for lighter, more vegetable-forward dishes and balance nicely with Mediterranean spices such as za’atar, harissa, and various herbs. The elegance and finesse of the reds work well with lighter meats such as chicken and lamb, perfectly complementing the regional cuisine.”

Adding unusual wine to a beverage program doesn’t always require extra cellar space. Brent Kroll, proprietor and sommelier at

Maxwell Park in Washington, D.C., suggests simply swapping stale selections with fresh options. “Silvaner [a German white wine] can replace Grüner [a dry Austrian white]. Silvaner tastes like waxy Grüner, but less green and sometimes spiced. Pair this with rabbit, pork and chicken,” he says, going on to recommend red Spanish Mencía instead of Gamay or Beaujolais (paired with grilled lean pro-



TABLE REZABAL ROSÉ AND VENISON TARTARE AT THE BREWER’S TABLE IN AUSTIN, TEXAS.

teins), Pinot Meunier to replace Pinot Noir, and Carricante to replace Chardonnay.

For Italian alternatives, Ferraro suggests a blended Etna Rosso instead of a Barolo. “It’s fresher, brighter and won’t disappoint!”

Overall, areas like Spain’s Basque Country or the Pacific Northwest are churning out fresh, funky varieties that not only pair well with food, but also attract new oenophiles. A Wine Market Council study published in 2016 suggested that, when it comes to wine, millennials are out-drinking Baby Boomers at a rapid pace. Millennials’ increasing spending in the wine category means that adding experimental wine styles and new grape varieties will likely give restaurants an edge when it comes to attracting—and keeping—a new generation of wine drinker. ■