

WINTERIZED WHITES

SOMMS SERVE TIPS ON ADJUSTING A WINE PROGRAM FOR WINTER MONTHS

BY MARIKA VIDA AND PATRICIA SAVOIE

Winter lurks in the shadows of shorter days, bringing cravings for hearty comfort foods to counter the chill. So, we turn to serious red wines, like Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Zinfandel, Malbec....

Yet there are many white wines that work brilliantly with winter fare: Consider Chardonnay (oaked or not), Pinot Blanc and Gris with their ripe melon and tropical notes, mouth-filling Viognier, spice-laden Gewürztraminer and perhaps the most ideal winter white of all, Riesling.

Whites with chewy textures and richness—whether from time in oak or more contact with lees—and often higher alcohol content possess the heft and substance customers are looking for in cold weather months when heartier fare is on the menu.

We talked with seven sommeliers and wine directors (including two in Canada, where they really know winter!) to discover some favorite cold-weather strategies.

WHAT WINES IN YOUR OPINION QUALIFY AS “WINTER WHITES”?

Jonathan Gonsenhauser: For me it’s a wine that has a lot of texture and weight on the palate, however it’s important that it comes from the grape and not just the oak barrel. I also think a touch more alcohol in those wines is also not such a bad thing.

Véronique Rivest: Fuller, fatter whites, with less acidity. Pinot Gris (not Grigio!), Gewürztraminer, Viognier come to mind. Southern French blends. Fuller and oakier wines. Because when it’s hot, oak and alcohol seem less desirable. Crisp and fresh sounds better. But then again, I’m a big proponent of drink whatever you feel like! Season and temperature are one

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thing, but so many other things influence our choices—what we’re eating, where we are, who we’re with, even our mood!

Adam Beckworth: Whites with a richer texture and a deeper acidity; whites that see some time in oak; whites that drink well at a slightly warmer temperature. Wines that work well with the heartier dishes we all love during the winter months—roast chicken, fall squashes and braised pork ragout.



Lauren Daddona: The unifying factor for winter whites is that they benefit from a serving temperature that is closer to cellar than to refrigerator. This puts us on the fuller-bodied white spectrum, and some of my particular favorites are given structure by phenolic bitterness more than acidity, so they can be great matches for poultry or even for red meat with a considerate preparation.

Anthony Boi: A winter white needs to be either comforting or more complex than summer glasses. We aren't looking for ice cold refreshment. Some avenues to take are whites that have spicy notes and are a little off-dry, or maybe even slightly oxidized. I also like to explore some more deeply aged whites in the winter.

Heidi Turzyn: I find White Burgundies to be perfect for the cold months, they are fuller in body and the oak add some nice richness for those cold months. While in the hot months I usually go for an un-oaked, high acid, crispy white wine.

Kathleen Thomas: Even in the desert scene of Las Vegas our menus shift to reflect the seasonal "winter wonderland" happening in other parts of the country. Foods become rich and warming so the wine pairings begin to reflect that as well. A winter white then would have more texture and/or richness, whether from higher alcohol content or a touch of oak influence, or have the intention of helping the palate move through those creamier dishes with bright acidity and tension. Of course there are whites that can mingle between seasons, one of which is the glorious creamy, dreamy world of bubbles.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITES?

Jonathan Gonsenhauser: I have been drinking a lot of Donnhoff Kahlenberg Trocken 2015, which to me showcases just how stunning German Riesling can be.



LAUREN DADDONA WINE DIRECTOR

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CITY: CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Lauren Daddona: Whites from the south of France are where I go first, Provence and Rhône in particular; they are richly textured and weighty without being fruit focused. I also seek out white Rioja, and there are quite a few Italians that fit the bill: Sicilian Carricante, Campanian whites and certain Alto Adige prestige bottlings such as Terlano's Vorberg Pinot Bianco.

Adam Beckworth: La Lastra in San Gimignano makes a beautiful Vernaccia Riserva that I love: it's rich and full and layered, with a pretty, citrus-driven minerality that keeps the wood treatment in check. I'd drink Kerner from Abbazia di Novacella in Alto Adige any time of the year, but it's especially nice in the winter because it is so versatile. The Le Haut Lieu Sec Vouvray from Domaine Huet in the Loire Valley is another stunner well-suited for cooler weather; this full-bodied Chenin Blanc with a ridiculously long finish will take you right through winter root vegetables and into whole-roasted salmon and brussels sprouts.



"THE UNIFYING FACTOR FOR WINTER WHITES IS THAT THEY BENEFIT FROM A SERVING TEMPERATURE THAT IS CLOSER TO CELLAR THAN TO REFRIGERATOR."

- LAUREN DADDONA

Véronique Rivest: I really like Pinot Gris with risottos, wild mushroom dishes or with a cheese course. Gewürztraminer also, simply, with a real, Alsace Munster cheese, steamed potatoes and caraway seeds or with a hearty curry dish. Marsanne and Roussanne based blends can stand up to more perfumed dishes as well as spicier dishes. Grüner Veltliner from Austria can be as fabulously rich and complex and versatile with food as great Alsace PG, and some of those Greek whites, powerful Assyrtiko from Santorini or Malagousia in a rich, spicy style (as Gerovassiliou does), also definitely fit the bill.

Kathleen Thomas: Château Rieussec, R de Rieussec, Bordeaux; Joseph Drouhin, Montrachet Marquis de Laguiche, Burgundy; René Rostaing, Condrieu, Rhône; R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia, Reserva Blanco, Rioja; Zind-Humbrecht "Clos Winsbuhl" Pinot Gris, Alsace; Rainer Sauer, 1er Escherndorfer Lump, Silvaner, Franken. BK Wines "Skin n' Bones" White out of Australia rocked my world in a recent tasting.

Anthony Boi: For the most part I enjoy the classics! Rhône for Viognier, Alsace for Gewürztraminer. Also

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CITY: NEW YORK CITY



Chenin Blanc and my guilty-pleasure: heavy-malo Chardonnay. In all cases aside from the Viognier, if we can be a few extra years bottle-aged the better.

Heidi Turzyn: Some producers that I like are: from Austria, Knoll, Jager, Alzinger; from Burgundy; Simon Bize, Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey, Alex Gambal and Boulangier; from Jura, Pelican and Tissot; and from Germany, Heymann-Lowenstein, Karthäuserhofberg and Groebe.

WHAT OR WHERE IS HOT NOW?

Véronique Rivest: Well, no one does Pinot Gris or Gewürz like Alsace. Chardonnay, there are good ones almost everywhere. But the great co-exists with the ugly. Canada makes some stunning chardonnays! Same for southern France—no one does those blends quite like them.

Jonathan Gonsenhauser: I think South Africa has been making some great headway on bringing amazing Chenin Blanc wines to the mainstream over the last few years and guests are really seeing just how magical they can be.

Lauren Daddona: There is a lot of curiosity right now surrounding lesser-known grapes, styles and regions. Some guests at Les Sablons beeline for the wackiest wine

on the list, almost without any concern over its flavor profile. Different is hot. For winter white regions of current interest, this could include Southwest France and Sicily in the Old World, or also New World Rhône blends from Swartland, Washington and beyond.

Adam Beckworth: I'm really jazzed about rich full-bodied Italian whites right now: Falanghina from Campania, Malvasia from Sicily, Kerner from Alto Adige.

HOW DOES YOUR WINE PROGRAM CHANGE DURING WINTER?

Lauren Daddona: Our by-the-glass offerings shift; in the winter there is an uptick in the average weight of the whites, as well as the reds. An argument can certainly be made for drinking seasonally, but one can also be made for drinking a favorite any given day of the year.

Adam Beckworth: We keep up with the seasons most directly with our glass pours, which evolve into fuller, heavier whites with rounder, richer textures and deep, tangy acidity.

Kathleen Thomas: Our program shifts regarding the wines for pairings to accommodate the textures and flavor profiles of the foods the chef chooses. Bubbles are always in season.

Anthony Boi: Our chef changes the menu every two to three weeks, at least for for four to five dishes. Our best matches for wine pairings then become wines by the glass.

Heidi Turzyn: Wine by the glass change seasonally just like our dishes do. We usually change the prep to add vegetables that are in season and sauces to match. For example, if we switch from a halibut with fresh tomatoes in a white balsamic vinaigrette to a halibut with cauliflower and mushrooms in a cream sauce, I would change from a Chablis to a Meursault. ■

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