

The Wine Hostess Tastings:
White Wine Primer: Wine Info Sheet

Riesling:

Riesling is considered by many wine experts to be the most noble and unique white grape variety in the world. The wine is often low in alcohol (sometimes 8%) and thus light in body. By comparison, most chardonnays are 13-14%. Rieslings are intensely flavorful wines of ravishing delicacy, transparency and lightness. They can range from dry to sweet (e.g., German Rieslings are usually sweeter). The refined structure is accented by mouth-watering flavors of fresh ripe peaches, apricots, and melons, sometimes pierced with a vibrant, mineral-like quality, like the taste of water running over stones in a mountain stream. Riesling is made principally in Germany, France, New Zealand, California, New York, Australia, Austria and South Africa.

Look: from very pale yellow/green to deep gold

Smell: apple, peach, orange blossom, floral, honey, citrus, petrol

Taste: crisp fruity acidity, dry to very sweet, light to full bodied, some taste orange blossoms with a touch of cinnamon and petrol. Riesling has been called fruit salad in a glass.

Food pairing: the touch of sweetness in most Rieslings acts as a coolant for your tongue with spicy dishes such as chips and salsa, Thai food, Indian food, spicy Chinese stir fry, Peking duck, Chinese barbecue spare ribs, etc.

Sauvignon Blanc:

Sauvignon Blanc, to me, is the opposite of chardonnay. Where Chardonnay is all creamy and buttery and round, Sauvignon Blanc is crisp, herbal, tart and clean. Flavors of straw, hay, grass, meadow, smoke, green tea, herbs, and gunflint run around your mouth with a wonderful intensity. There is no mistaking a sauvignon Blanc. I like the Sauvignon Blancs from New Zealand, but there are many others. In the Loire, *Sancerre and Pouilly-Fumé* are two wonderful wines. In Bordeaux, Sauvignon Blanc is blended with Sémillon which mellows the tartness of the Sauvignon Blanc. These are wonderful wines. California makes some beautiful sauvignon Blancs too; some are called Fume Blanc.

Look: from pale yellow to gold

Sauvignon Blanc (continued):

Smell: no mistaking the smell of Sauvignon Blanc: A pungent, grassy smell often hits you on the nose along with bell peppers, grapefruit, gooseberry

Taste: you will notice that it is a little bit fuller bodied than the Riesling, with crisp, tangy, vibrant acidity. Think Granny Smith Apples, herbal flavors, as well as a minerally flintiness at times, depending upon where it's from

Food pairing: goes well with vegetarian meals, salad, sushi, goat cheese, fish or chicken Francese

Chardonnay:

One of the most successful and popular white wines in the world. It is grown just about everywhere but does especially well in cooler climates. It has a range of styles from the French classic *Chablis* with its steely minerality, green apple and citrus flavors to full opulent whites from the Cote d'Or in Burgundy and the New World. These wines display appealing, big flavors for the most part— tropical fruit, lemon, butter, toast, and vanilla. They are lush, creamy and full-bodied. Chardonnay is also one of the main grapes used to make champagne and sparkling wine. Chardonnay is the number one selling white wine in this country because it has what we are looking for in wine more than anything else: fruit.

Look: yellow to gold; the darkest yet in this tasting

Smell: from the scent alone, you can probably guess that this wine is more full bodied than the Sauvignon Blanc. Look for ripe pears, soft Apple aromas—think golden delicious rather than tart Granny Smith. Look for aromas of vanilla, cream soda, some toast and nuts, butterscotch, and tropical fruit

Taste: this is one of the richest and heaviest white wines. This wine is softer and rounder due to the time spent in oak barrels

Food pairing: The classic pairing not to miss is Chardonnay and lobster. Also works well with roast chicken, and heavier fish such as swordfish or Salmon. Pairs well with dishes featuring creamy buttery sauces

Viognier:

Viognier is one of the finest but rarest French white grapes, located in the northern Rhone, where it is used to make the prestigious wines of Condrieu and Chateau Grillet. Also grown in California. Viognier's appeal is in its exotic, honeysuckle, musky fruit, its round body, and its mesmerizingly lanolinish texture.

Look: pale to deep golden yellow

Smell: floral scents such as honeysuckle or orange blossom are common, as are stone fruits such as peach and apricot. Some show a subtle earthiness

Taste: this is a full-blown exotic wine. From the aromas, you may think you're going to be tasting a tropical drink; but, surprisingly, the wine is dry on the finish. It's an amazing experience, not to miss!

Food pairing: this wine is best suited to simple foods-a fine cheese, or meat or fish simply grilled or roasted-no fussy preparation, let the wine shine

Gewurztraminer:

Grown in Alsace, France and in California, it needs a cool climate. Although this grape can be temperamental to grow, it can yield wines that are magnificent. At its best it produces a floral and refreshing wine with crisp acidity that pairs well with spicy dishes. This wine is medium to full bodied with low acidity. The flavors are lychee, quince, candied ginger and pineapple. When left for late harvest, it's uncommonly rich and complex, making it a delicious dessert wine.

Look: dry yellow, to yellow gold

Smell: take a moment to really take this one in. Get your nose down into the glass; you may sense ginger, clove, nutmeg. Some people detect aromas of lychee nuts and apricots

Taste: the flavors definitely echo the aromas, a distinctive spicy flavor---soft and velvety, medium to full bodied. This wine can be dry to slightly sweet

Food pairing: goes especially well with exotically spiced dishes such as Indian and Thai food

Chenin Blanc:

The most vibrant, and famous Chenin Blancs in the world come from the Loire Valley in France. Specifically, they are from *Savennieres, Vouvry, Anjou, and Saumur*. The age worthiness of these wines made from chenin blanc grapes is legendary though little known to American wine drinkers. Stunningly complex, they are some of the world's greatest white wines. Most are dry but many have a touch of sweetness that is barely perceptible. Some Chenin Blancs are fully sweet and can be phenomenal. Quarts de Chaume is the most recognized one of these. Chenin Blanc is also the leading white grape of South Africa where it is called Steen. It is grown in California as well.

Look: pale yellow green to straw yellow

Smell: aromas of apples, pears, quince, chamomile, honey and cream may be present in these wines at their best

Taste: prominent taste of almonds with some age. Fruity and spicy flavor, thirst quenching

Food pairing: shrimp, crab, lobster, shellfish, Asian food, poultry

Tasting Wine

Follow these easy steps when you taste and evaluate wines:

See: Hold the glass up to the light; notice the color and clarity

Swirl and Sniff: Swirl to release the aromas, smell the fruit and other scents

Sip: Take a small amount of the wine and hold it in your mouth; breathe in some air and pass it over the wine to release more aromas