

WINE

It's Time to Start Aging White Wine

Five bottles to challenge conventional wine wisdom.

by Jim Clarke

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Even if you don't know much about wine, you probably know that thumbing your nose at a well-aged red risks looking like a jerk—or even, the Jerk, as when Steve Martin's title character turns down a bottle of 1966 Château Latour: "Let's splurge! Bring us some fresh wine, the freshest you've got!"

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But white wine drinkers do this exact thing all the time. That's their loss, says Matthew Kaner, co-owner of Augustine Wine Bar in Los Angeles, which specializes in aged wines. "White wine can age amazingly well," he says.

Many of these age-worthy whites come from cooler climates such as the Mosel region of Germany—where primarily Riesling grapes are grown—and France's Loire Valley. The grapes in cooler regions



- Many California whites simply aren't built for aging, but Kalin's "Cuvée L.V." Chardonnay from 1995 is a rare, delicious exception with toasty, tangerine, and honeyed aromas. Source: Kalin Cellars

don't ripen as quickly, creating acidity that, together with some sweetness, will function as a preservative. Whites from warmer regions, such as Spain's Rioja or the southern Rhône, can also age well thanks to having more of a tannic structure like reds. Classic dessert wines such as Sauternes and Tokaji, as well, have a concentration of sugars that makes them built to last.

John McIlwain, of Chambers Street Wines in

Manhattan, is also a fan. Contrary to popular belief, he says that a white wine's initial fruit notes may fade a bit, but they also become more honeyed. Even the way that the wine feels in the mouth takes on "a beautiful burnished texture, while the acid energizes it without tasting sharp."

White wines can be more delicate during aging than reds, so make sure they've been stored properly. The surest way is to buy directly from the winery: Some of them, such as Marin County's Kalin as well as López de Heredia in Spain, will hold back vintages and release them later. And while an older white may seem less thirst-quenching, it more than compensates with a wide range of honey, spice, and nutty aromas and a texture that's denser and more refined. Here are five producers to keep an eye out for.



■ Hanno Zilliken in the Zilliken library cellar, where older vintages age before release. Source: Rudi Wiest Selections

López de Heredia

This classic Rioja property ages all its wines before release, and it makes only a Gran Reserva—that is, the most intense and complex—in years when the growing conditions are superb. The current Gran Reserva on the market is the 2003, but also look for 1987 and 1994. Or go back more than three decades for the 1981 version, which is full-bodied, nutty, and rich. *\$200, PJ Wine, New York; pjwine.com*

Moët & Chandon

Champagne's carbon dioxide is a preservative, so bubbles can hold up very well. Whenever Moët releases a new vintage—the latest is from 2004—an older “library” wine hits the shelves as well, straight from its cellars. The 1992 Grand Vintage is plump and round in texture, with aromas of pastries and roasted nuts. *\$170, Kendall Fine Wine, Miami; finewinespirits.com*



■ Moët & Chandon's 1992 Grand Vintage. Source: Courtesy of Moët-Hennessy

Raveneau

Chablis can be delicious when recently made, but then it tends to go mute for a while before opening up after a decade or so. Raveneau is a top producer, and this wine, the 2000 Blanchots Grand Cru Chablis is a silky powerhouse. It comes from one of Chablis' seven Grand Cru vineyards - that is, one that is officially recognized as one of the region's best, based on soil, growing conditions, and a long history of producing great wines. \$450, Kermit Lynch, Berkeley; kermitlynch.com

Kalin

Many California whites simply aren't built for aging, but northern California winery Kalin not only makes age-worthy wines, it matures them at the winery before it sells



- For Zilliken, 1999 yielded both a Spätlese, and a richer, sweeter Auslese. Source: Rudi Wiest Selections

or more years, Zilliken's 1999 Saarburger Rausch Spätlese melds those characteristics to form an elegant and firm wine with ripe stone fruit and umami notes. \$130, Astor Wine Center, New York; astorwines.com

them. Its Sauvignon Blancs and Semillon age fantastically, but try this "Cuvée L.V." Chardonnay from 1995 for its toasty, tangerine, and honeyed aromas. \$33, *K&L Wine Merchants, California*; klwines.com

Zilliken

Young Rieslings typically show sweetness up front and acidity on the finish, but after aging for a dozen



■ The Riesling vines of the Saarburger Rausch vineyard in the Saar Valley. Source: Rudi Wiest Selections

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