

Summer Wines¹

Think Light Not Heavy, Crisp Not Syrupy

BY THOMAS M. CIESLA

It's June and many parts of the country are already experiencing above normal temperatures. In southeast Texas, the combination of high temperatures and high humidity levels makes it 'screaming hot' as a local weatherman remarked. Of course this is just the beginning of the heat and triple digits days are fast approaching, so what wine will cool the palate this summer? Perhaps a tannic red Bordeaux or California Cabernet Sauvignon? Not in a million years! Maybe a tangy Syrah or Tempranillo? No way! How about a crisp, slightly fruity wine? Priceless!



There are several types of wine that work great with summer temperatures and food styles. White wines and sparkling wines are especially refreshing, though all too often these are served too cold. And while reds often take the back seat in summer, lighter reds properly chilled can be very refreshing. In general, it's best to avoid wines that are too sweet or over-oaked. Whatever your choice, don't limit yourself to low quality, cheap wines that seem to be as synonymous with 'summer' as 'summer reads' – you know those cheap, tawdry paperbacks that you swear you never read

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during the rest of the year.

However, retailers and restaurant owners alike will admit that people tend to buy less expensive wines during the summer. One reason is that we entertain more outdoors and therefore consume more wine than usual. You're not worried about varietal, vineyard or vintage; you just want a refreshing, cold quaff. Save the swirl and sip routine for a less hostile environment. Sitting poolside in the hot sun, with the smell of suntan lotion and chlorine filling the air, the wine in our glass should be cool and refreshing to quench our thirst.

Sauvignon Blanc is the epitome of a summer wine with its crisp and herbal flavors with hints of citrus and lemongrass. Dry Rieslings also show good acidity with just a hint of sweetness that can be refreshing in the heat. If you really want to be wild and crazy, try a Chardonnay and Viognier blend. Many New-World

Chardonnays have moved beyond the big, fat, buttery monsters of the 90's to wines more in line with Old World styles that resemble crisp, refreshing Chablis.

With Light Appetizers

We all love eating outdoors. A covered patio, gazebo or shaded table at a sidewalk cafe' are all great places for a snack or lunch alfresco style. For starters, fruit and cheese plates or sandwiches served with grilled vegetables beg for Pinot Gris (Pinot Grigio from Italy), or one of my favorites – a cool sparkling wine.

While Pinot Gris has sometimes been given a bad rap as an often flaccid, whumpy wine, recent vintages show wines possessing a lot of character, with floral and tropical fruit aromas. Today, this light crisp wine seems to have "Summer" written all over it. Summer is also a great time to experiment with some offbeat white blends, offering new combinations of aromatics and flavors that explode on the palate. How about a Semillion, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle blend, or a Roussanne and Marsanne blend? Check with your local wine shop or winery to what's available.



A cool glass of wine while sitting by the pool is a great way to enjoy the afternoon. Consider plastic wine glasses in this environment.



Pair a cool and refreshing shrimp appetizer with a sparkling wine or crisp Sauvignon Blanc.

Sparkling wines from France, Italy, Germany, Spain, or the New World wine regions are good any time, and are especially refreshing in the summer heat. These sparklers also go perfectly with grilled shrimp or light chicken (olive oil - yes, lemon or vinegar - no). In Mediterranean climates such as Italy, when evenings turn sultry and air conditioning is hard to find, many Italians move outdoors and start with a glass of sparkling wine to cool off.

Consider The Rose'

In the last two decades of the 20th century, the spread of sweet, bubble-gum flavored White Zinfandels gave real Rose' wines a bad rap. This is unfortunate because great

Rose wines have been produced in various wine regions, long before those cloying California sweet-bombs came onto the market. Dry Rose's from France are perhaps the most famous, made in the traditional style of crushing red grapes and allowing the juice to stay on the skins just long enough to extract a bit of the color. A well-made Rose' offers a whole new range of flavors, from pomegranate and cranberry, to melon and strawberry highlights.

Two great things about Rose': it pairs well with a wide variety of food, and it's usually inexpensive. Almost any red varietal grape can be used to make a rose' wine. Try experimenting with different Rose's to compare the flavor profiles of the different grapes, such as a Cabernet rose' versus a Malbec or Syrah rose'.

Wines For Grilled Dishes

Is there room for reds this time of year? Of course, you just have to change your focus and keep in mind that whether you prefer the slow cooking of BBQ or the quick cooking of the grill, each technique usually incorporates a host of rubs and sauces, all of which will affect the flavor of the wine. Shift from tannic wines such as Cabernet's

Chardonnay

The history of Chardonnay has been heavily researched over the last few decades. Using DNA profiling, Dr. Carole Meredith discovered that Chardonnay grapes are the result of a cross between the Pinot family and a very old grape called Gouais Blanc. Like the Primitivo grape in Italy (Zinfandel in the U.S.), Gouais Blanc originated in the Croatia region, and was brought to France by Cistercian monks. Chardonnay is named after a village called Chardonnay in Maconnais located in southern France's Burgundy region. The name comes from 'cardonnacum' that is known as a 'place full of thistles'. The earliest recorded reference to Chardonnay occurs in 1330. Chardonnay is also known as Aubaine, Beaunois, Melon Blanc and Morillon – a name used during the Middle Ages in Burgundy and an old name for Chardonnay in the region of Chablis.



Though oaked wines tend to be overpowering in the summer heat, they often work well with food cooked over wood or charcoal. This cedar plank halibut pairs well with an oaky Chardonnay.

Burgers & Steaks

A variety of herbs and spices can be used to prepare these meats for grilling, but in general, pairing with a Zinfandel or Merlot does the trick. You could even experiment with a fruity Cabernet Franc.

Chicken

In addition to the Sparkling wine mentioned for lightly seasoned chicken, a crisp white like Sauvignon Blanc would work or maybe a dry Riesling. As the seasoning becomes heartier, however, move towards Zinfandel or Cabernet Franc.

Fish

For grilled Salmon, Pinot Noir is a match made in heaven. With other fish you might try a Rose' as these wines have unique characteristics that do well chilled. The crispness and pleasant fragrances make Rose's a great match with fish and shrimp.

Outdoor Oddities

Enjoying wine outside in the summertime allows us to take some artistic license when interpreting the usual traditions. Just hope that your fellow wine drinkers are as open-minded as you are when you:

- Plop a few ice cubes (*GASP!*) into your wine glass. In 90+ degree weather, the initial chill only lasts so long.
- Add a splash of Sprite to liven up your wine.
- Create a '**Dry Comal Creek Magarita**' by pouring a French Colombard (from Dry Comal Creek Vineyards), into a frozen glass and topping it off with a slice of lime. *Tasty!*
- If you like jalapenos with your BBQ, why not try some **Jalapeno Wine** from Circle S Vineyards?

Quick Tips

- Keep both your food and beverages out of the direct sunlight.
- Keep wines iced down at all times. An outdoor sink filled with ice makes a nice chiller for wine bottles. Or squeeze a few wine bottles into that galvanized washtub filled with ice, sodas and beer.

Careful though, be sure those corks and pushed in snug. As liquid volume decreases, the wine bottle could tip on its side; you don't want any of that tub water sneaking into the wine.
- To help the ice last longer in a cooler or tub, drop in a chunk of dry ice.
- To ward off dehydration, have a good supply of cold bottled water handy.

There are, of course, many other wines suitable for drinking during the summer. An often overlooked Burgundian grape is Gamay, usually associated with Beaujolais Nouveau, a wine too light for almost any time of year (unless you're a staunch fan). But other Gamay-based wines from Burgundy region do well with the summer heat. Austria's Gruner-Veltliner is a crisp wine great for sipping by the pool or pairing with seafood. From Portugal comes the slightly effervescent (an inexpensive) Vinho Verde, that might be the perfect match for a refreshing wine that isn't a Champagne or Sparkling wine. Just remember, the best summer wine is the wine that appeals to you. Experimentation is allowed, whether you're pouring wine over ice cubes, or given your wine a shot of spritzer. If you like it, drink it proudly.

SANGRIA

If you like Sangria, try this recipe:

- 1 bottle of white wine
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1/4 cup of lemon juice
- 1/4 cup white grape juice
- 1/2 cup of vodka
- 1 cup halved grapes
- 1 lemon, sliced
- 1 orange, sliced Mix items together in a pitcher and chill before serving.