

Transition Wines

WITH VOLUME AND ACIDITY, THESE WHITE WINES WILL PLAY THE LEAD FOR FALL'S MORE SAVORY DISHES

by Meg Houston Maker

The heat breaks, the days shorten, and we start to honor our soulful, autumnal craving for the roasted, baked and fried. Some wine lovers steer away from white wines now—even abandon them altogether until the cherry blossoms bloom again.

That's a pity. Sure, classic harvest foods like venison, squashes, game birds, smoked meats and savory pastries call for wines with real substance. We could reach for a big-boned Chardonnay, but that custardy richness is best for deep winter.

What we really need to serve and sell are transition whites, wines that segue between the lemony-crispness of summer and the heady redolence of winter. Whites with volume but acidity to keep things light. Wines inherently rich without cellar tinkering, with flavors of stone fruits, pome fruits (apples, pears), honey, a filigree of nut and spice, a woody sweetness truly evocative of fall.

Fortunately, options abound. Grape varieties like Viognier, Chenin Blanc, Albariño and Sémillon are intrinsically opulent without being syrupy. Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris have comparable heft, although their flavors skew more toward pome fruits, perfect for fall.

Rhône whites have oomph to balance richer food and herbal notes that beautifully accent vegetables. Grapes with spicy flavors, like Gewürztraminer, are wonderful with cheeses, apples and nuts. Gewürz is a go-to for piquant Pacific Rim cuisine.

Below are seven whites I've selected for fall, focused on options that deliver value. Customers may be unfamiliar with some of these grapes, but that's where you as a professional come in. It's high season to give them a try.

FEL 2015 Pinot Gris, Anderson Valley (\$25) Just what I'm seeking in an autumnal wine: moony and luminous, it wraps the silky succulence of pome fruits around a glittery acid core. A hint of nuts and honey adds dimension.



LEDE FAMILY WINES

Trimbach 2012 Gewürztraminer, Alsace AOP, France (\$21) A perfume of ginger, cardamom and nutmeg drifts above an exotic mélange of tropical and tree fruits. A touch of residual sugar makes it superlative with spicy cuisine.



PALM BAY INTERNATIONAL



Alois Lageder 2013 Haberle Pinot Bianco, Alto Adige DOC, Italy (\$23) Sappy like a bite of yellow apple drenched in lemon and acacia honey. Bottle age has added a tinge of dried fruits and beeswax.

DALLA TERRA



Dry Creek Vineyard 2014 Chenin Blanc, Wilson Ranch, Clarksburg (\$12) A fragrance of sweetgrass, honeysuckle and nectarine segues seamlessly to tawny Bosc pear and melon. Jazzy acidity balances the opulence.

Stemmari 2013 Dalila Bianco, Terre Siciliane IGT, Italy (\$14) Grillo adds apple-y crispness, Viognier adds peachy flesh, and the net effect is a mouthful of orchard fruits and marzipan and bread.



PRESTIGE WINE IMPORTS

Michel Chapoutier 2014 Les Vignes de Bila-Haut, Côtes du Roussillon AOP, France (\$16) This blend suggests wet stone, white flowers and yellow melon. An herbal breath drifts through at the finish.



TERLATO WINES

Quinta de Santiago 2014 Alvarinho Reserva Monção e Melgaço, Vinho Verde DOC, Portugal (\$21) Barrel-fermenting Alvarinho with skin contact adds structure, texture and spice. This is not a spritzy Vinho Verde, and the non-Reserva offering is also great.

Brand new to the U.S. market.

SILVER COAST IMPORTS

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