

# Observer-Tribune

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## Summer whites: Out with the old, in with the new



**Ash  
Rajan**

**READ BETWEEN THE WINES**

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes,” according to Marcel Proust.

Marcel, seriously. Can we do both? Seek new landscapes and have new eyes?

With implied consent from the great essayist, I am going to embark on making this month’s column as much about discovery — that mystique element of human behavior — as it is about wine.

As humans, we tend to cuddle up to our comfort zones and safe harbors. Discovery to most of us is like a xylophone to a rock band — intriguing but rarely used.

Yet, we are in awe of discoverers — the Columbuses, the Vasco da Gamas, the Magellans.

And to think if Chris had just hunkered down with his paella in his native Spain, you and I would have never seen America or Oreos or peanut butter.

So follow this pied piper on this grape discovery.

Armed with the poetic license of an economist to make assumptions, I assume you love Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Grigio and Reisling as your comfort whites.

All are delectable beauties in their own right — so addictive to the souls of your taste buds.

Yes, taste buds have souls. A gentle hiatus from those comfort wines will only make your bonds grow fonder.

### See You Later, Sauvignon Blanc

It is hard to resist the spray of fresh-cut grass, peach, pineapple and herbs. It’s like imbibing all of New Zealand in a gulp.

You can’t break up by text on this one. It would have to be a teary farewell even if it’s for one summer.

I did at the limestone-dressed hamlet of Vouvray, France, when I took a wrong fork in the road back from Chateneuf Du Pape.

The 16th-century Nitrav Castle was the gatehouse to the discovery of Vouvray, with its loft tasting room above the chapel, the stables and the barrel cooperage.

The heady elixir of horses, leather, oak, mesquite and the breezes from the castle’s rose garden played like a thousand flutes to the stark purity of the chenin blanc.

As I imbibed the last drop of a miserly

tasting pour, the chapel bell chimed, as if by divine invitation, and Vouvray was etched in my soul forever.

Ask Domaine Huet in France and Pautmanok Vineyards on the North Fork of Long Island, if they will sell you a bottle. They are usually gone.

If you simply can’t let go, at least pick the princes from the plonk.

My favorite, introduced to me by a dear friend, is Quarz from Italy’s Cantina Terlan or think Ca’ Baloni, a Sauvignon Blanc that scored 90 points with “Wine Enthusiast” and a 92 with this enthusiast.

This pale, straw-colored, fruity and floral aromatic bomb displays passion fruit, grapefruit peel and some white pepper notes.

Drive farther south to Sicily and a pair of Donna Fugata wines, the Sur Sur and the Lighea, will surprise you as they did me.

You may have never heard of their grapes, the Grillo and the Zibibbo, but you will surrender to their peach, gooseberry and elderflower attack on your palette.

Fresh and balanced is an understatement in these exotic whites. Apt companions for pasta and barbeque this summer.

### Press Pause On Riesling

Say “GUH-woorts-TRAH-minner” and “GREW-ner-VELT-lee-ner”. Now that you have it down, expect a blue ribbon in the mail from the Alsace and Austrian chambers of commerce.

The Trams and Gruners are intensely floral, aromatic, spicy wines that range from bone dry to decadently sweet. They are crisp, grapefruit-rinsed, oak-agnostic wines that pair as well as Rieslings with spicy Asian food, which makes for a summer wine that is as upbeat as a tour guide with the austerity of a librarian.

The usual flavor cavalry of peach, citrus and apple show up here, too, but the better producers extract white pepper and a gaggle of minerals to the spectrum.

### Goodbye To You, Chardonnay

Breaking up is really hard to do with this grape. Even for one summer.

Knowing Chardonnay devotees for years, it is next to impossible to wean them off those waves of butter, oak and coconut. Or from the Kistler or the White Burgundy crowd, its crisp, stony and acidic notes. I am already hearing a loud “fuggedaboutit.”

Jump ship and drop anchor in the quaint hamlets of Viognier, Sancerre and who can deny that blushing Rose’.

While I am loyal to the Provençal Rose, I was quite taken with a 2016 blush from Windsor in Sonoma County that I reviewed along with a B.R. Cohn from San Luis Obispo.

Both were fresh, well balanced Rose's, striking an acidic prelude to a calming sweetness that screamed spring.

The pair encountered an assorted, theme-less lunch of oysters, sushi and Thai lemon-grass soup with aplomb, busting the myth that Rose' is an aperitif wine and not a pairing wine.

## Love The Viogniers

The Calasole from Rocca Di Montemasgi, a Tuscan white made from the Vermentino grape, was the melon and lemon pre-amble to this lunch. It danced like a bell strike in my delicate Zalto goblet, every sip a chime.

Love those Viogniers -- pronounced Vee-own-yay — the straw-gold color dates back to the Roman Empire. Legend has it that one emperor ripped up an entire viognier vineyard when the locals, buzzed by viognier, revolted.

Can't ignore the Sancerres' either, whose austerity comes from the vine-

yards being on the same chalk fault line as Chablis and some Epernay champagnes.

I pair Sancerres with over-the-top gooey fruit pies and cobblers; its dry, crisp demeanor contrasting with the pastry's moist decadence.

Furmint (Furwho?) from Hungary's Tokaj, pronounced Tokai or Tokay, region is a relatively unknown yet versatile grape whose late-harvest dessert avatar, Aszu, was Wednesday wine at Versailles when Louis XV was in residence.

That is there where it earned the immortal moniker, "Vinum Regum, Rex Vinorum" ("Wine of Kings, King of Wines").

## Is Summer An Embargo For Reds?

No way Jose'. Reds in the summer may not be your comfort zone, but as the saying goes, "Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore."

Especially if those reds are my favorite Umbrian Sagrantinos.

My first encounter came at a Super-Tuscan tasting 50 years ago — from a friend who introduced this best-kept Italian secret since the Vespa.

It did not flinch given the elevated company of the Tuscan titans that were on the table. My tasting council missed a heart-beat. That good, the juice!

A tasting orgy of a trio of premier Sagrantinos broke out starting with an angelic Montefalco from Arnaldo Caprai, neck to neck with Perticaia's delectable Sagrantino followed by the elegant and fleshy Tenuta Alzatura.

It was a numbing and heady Umbrian immersion. As heady as the fragrance of discovering rare white truffles with Stella, the dog at my truffle hunt in Umbria.

If it were wild boar instead of truffles, these Sagrantinos got game.

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