

Nick's WINE of the WEEK

Winning White From Armagnac

About ten years ago one of London's venerable old wine merchants – I don't remember which one, which is probably a good thing for reasons that will soon become apparent – made the prediction that the next "hot" wine region was going to be France's south-west, a region stretching from Languedoc and Roussillon on the Mediterranean coast west along the base of the Pyrenees almost to the Atlantic.



Well, they were wrong. A lot of money has flowed into the region but the results so far have been pretty disappointing, and anyone who has seen the provocative if flawed film, *Mondo Vino*, will have a pretty good idea as to why.

However there are exceptions – there are always exceptions when it comes to wine – and top of my list are the white wines from *Domaine du Tariquet*, located in the heart of Armagnac. The estate has been owned by the Grassa family since 1912 but has been making Armagnac since at least 1683. The trouble is the market for this wonderful brandy is not exactly booming these days so, in the 1980's, the current owners, Maité and Yves Grassa decided to break with custom and plant additional, non-traditional grape varieties in order to make and sell still white wine in parallel to the Armagnac business, and a huge success it has been.

They now make nine different varietal combinations, five of which are available in the US market. They are all wines possessed of utterly distinct personalities, and all terrific value at between \$11 and \$16.50. My favorite is the *Domaine du Côté Tariquet Chardonnay- Sauvignon Blanc 2007* (\$16.50). Chardonnay blends like this are seldom a success but here it works splendidly. This is a pretty, flirtatious wine that just glows with bright fruits – pineapple, citrus, melon – with each varietal playing off the other in a delicious harmony of summer flavors.

A word of warning – Tariquet, just to make things confusing, switched labels in mid-vintage so if the one you see in the wine shop has a white label don't worry, it is the same wine.



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NWOW Rating: ★★★★★

When to Drink: Now

Breathing/Decanting: Not necessary

Food Pairing: Good as an aperitif and with Asian food.

Grapes: Chardonnay – 50%, Sauvignon Blanc – 50%.

Appellation: Vin de Pays des Côtes de Gascogne

Region: Armagnac

Country: France

Price: \$16.50

Availability: Moderate