

PRIVATE Clubs



Which wines are best to drink this summer?

Summer Swilling

Five wine experts reveal what they'll be drinking through the dog days. Get ready to uncork a few of these for yourself.

BY W.R. TISH

Summer's swelter can be tough in the *vino* department. Trophy cabernets start to resemble anvils. Oaky chardonnays bite back. An ice bucket for reds seems not the least bit crazy.

To meet the heat head-on this year, we turned to some bright minds and palates on the wine scene, and asked how they'll adjust their thinking about wine during the long, hot days ahead. Talk rarely touched on brand or vintage, and never on scores. As one of our panelists, importer Bobby Kacher, put it: "Summer is a reminder we don't worship wine, we drink it."

Summer wines succeed on feel, not just flavor. The ones that work best are light, refreshing, and nimble at the table — because that table may well be a picnic table. And perhaps more than during any other season, wine pleasure in the summer derives as much from *where* you are or *what* you're eating as it does from the bottle's pedigree.

Our Summer Wine Experts

BOB BLUE

Having grown up in a family of teetotalers, Bob Blue's first wine experience came while traveling in Germany as a GI in 1976. The founding winemaker at Mendocino-based Bonterra Vineyards since its 1990-vintage debut, Blue is now a veritable elder statesman of the burgeoning organic wine movement. Bonterra is also the official wine of the PGA, which dovetails nicely with Blue's favorite sport.

JEAN-CHARLES BOISSET

Well rooted yet well traveled, Jean-Charles Boisset grew up in the storied village of Vougeot, then studied in London, Germany, Spain, and L.A. before turning his family's Burgundy-based business into an international venture. Named one of the wine world's top 50 power brokers by *Decanter* magazine, Boisset is particularly known for innovation in packaging (Tetra Pak, plastic, aluminum) and sustainable viticulture.

BOBBY KACHER

Bobby Kacher caught the wine bug while backpacking through France in college. A boutique importer for the past 22 years, he now spends almost half of each year there, crisscrossing appellations and visiting dozens of estates. His hands-on approach, working aggressively with growers to improve quality, has earned wide praise from critics. In 2004, he became one of a handful of Americans to receive the honor *Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole* from the French government.

GARY VAYNERCHUK

Known for magnum-sized enthusiasm, Gary Vaynerchuk turned his father's New Jersey liquor store into the wine juggernaut Wine Library, with \$50 million in annual sales. Since 2006, when he launched the homespun (and often manic) video blog known as Wine Library TV, Vaynerchuk has been tagged as an expert not only on wine, but also branding, Internet commerce, and social media.

KIM STARE WALLACE

As vice president of the family-owned Dry Creek Vineyard, Kim Stare Wallace takes an especially wide-reaching approach to wine. She has a hand in everything from barrel-sampling and label art to hospitality and marketing. She also blogs (wilmaswineworld.com) and spearheads associations devoted to Meritage, Sauvignon Blanc (whatisfume.com), and Dry Creek Valley.

What wines do you drink when it gets hot?

Boisset: I want good acidity and minerality, like the flintiness of a good Chablis. I am for finesse over boldness, elegance over largeness. Summer wine is all about freshness, being outdoors, by water, with good friends.

Vaynerchuk: We taste 100-200 brands to come up with our summer whites. We'll have a go-to New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, a go-to Albariño. Personally, I love Quincy, a Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire. But it's not just about white. I'm huge on Beaujolais Cru. Gamay is a vastly underrated grape, and it's a red that really tastes good chilled.

Wallace: I drink a lot of our own Chenin Blanc — it's so easygoing — and Fumé Blanc. I can do without the big reds, but Zinfandel always works for me.

Kacher: Whenever anyone asks what I drink, I say it depends on what I'm wearing. Summer, I'm usually in shorts, sandals, T-shirts ... and drinking a lot of pink. Explosive, fresh, completely dry rosés.

Blue: Temperatures in Mendocino can hit 100 degrees, so I tend to migrate toward cooler, aromatic whites like Roussanne and rosé wines. This summer, Grenache is on my radar.

What are some of your favorite summer pairings?

Wallace: Our family eats very simply, but fresh. Everything goes on the grill. That's where the Zin comes in.

Vaynerchuk: I make a big play on oysters — Kumamoto and Olympia — and crack open a bunch of crispy whites. Chablis, Sancerre, Rueda. And I am a wine and corn fan. Grilled or steamed, with Cabernet Franc, such as Bourgueil, which has a real veggie edge. It's a V8 juice kind of thing.

Blue: We have a farmer's market in my hometown that even includes fresh fish brought over right off the boat. When I see beautiful Pacific salmon, I go for Anderson Valley Pinot Noir.

Kacher: Grilled fish with rosé and Malbec with grilled meats.

Which summer wine festivals do you try to visit each year?

Boisset: The Food & Wine Classic in Aspen [June 19-21]. Everybody is isolated in a magnificent setting. It's very international. You can really play and learn a great deal.

Wallace: The New Orleans Wine & Food Experience [every May]. It's practically a food festival.

Kacher: The Nantucket festival is great. They say, "bring the wines you like," and people really appreciate them. Also the International Pinot Noir Celebration [July 24-26] in Oregon. It is a great place to experience the cultural side of the product.

Blue: I enjoy the various festivals in Colorado, but it's really more about the energy that people bring than the geographic location.

What is a wine region you'd love to visit?

Wallace: This may sound a little hokey, but the Hermann Wine Trail, in Missouri, along the river. I hear the scenery is lovely and the wineries there have a lot of history.

Blue: Spain, Spain, Spain. It's intriguing. What am I waiting for?

Vaynerchuk: I almost never go away for more than a few days, but believe it or not, this summer I am going to New Zealand and Tasmania. Yes, it will be winter there, but my wine goal is reds, especially Pinot Noir.

Boisset: It's not a wine region, but I was born on the day man first stepped on the moon. That is one place I have never stopped dreaming of visiting.

Just *Chillin'*

A dozen wines that can stand up to summer heat

Albariño. Spain's hot white ticket, hailing from the northwest corner by the ocean. Serendipitously, this fleshy but crisp white goes swimmingly with anything that gets from sea to table — shrimp, fish, crab, mussels, steamers.

Beaujolais. Set aside all thoughts of the bubble-gummy Nouveau released each year just weeks after harvest. This is "real" red wine, made from the same Gamay grape, with more depth, and driven by bright strawberry fruit. Start with a Beaujolais-Villages from Louis Jadot. If that hits your sweet spot, various bottlings from the Beaujolais Crus (subdistricts) will please as well.

Cava. One of Gary Vaynerchuk's catchphrases is wines that "bring thunder to your world." So what would he drink during a raging summer storm? "Give me bubbles. Spanish Cava is, dollar for dollar, incredible." Some to try: Raventos i Blanc; Marques de Gelida; Juvé y Camps Rosé.

Chablis. Saddled with an identity crisis in the U.S., thanks to lots of California jugs labeled "Chablis" decades ago, *real* Chablis — from the Burgundian village of the same name — has never been better. It's crisp, minerally, squeaky-clean Chardonnay that outrefreshes the buttery ones by a mile.

Chenin Blanc. For decades an unstated blending prop in California Chardonnays, Chenin Blanc yields a crisp delicate style when vinified dry, with both floral and citrus notes. Dry Creek Vineyard arguably makes California's best; South Africa also excels at the dry style (often called Steen); and French Vouvrays display the grape's more complex side, with a shadow of sweetness.

Malbec. Not too serious, yet not too wimpy, Malbec from Argentina is a great choice for backyard sipping. For summer's sake, lean toward lighter examples like Alamos, Toso, and Altos Las Hormigas. More expensive, serious ones can be too intense, woody, and/or tannic for outdoor success.

Pinot Noir. Thanks to its thin skins that lend less tannin to the wine's structure, Pinot is often referred to as the white wine of reds. It is notoriously fickle in both vineyard and winery, but plenty of good ones abound, hailing from California and Oregon. From Burgundy, simple Bourgognes are the smart bet in warm weather.

Riesling. This noble white grape is a notorious shape-shifter, and can range in style from light, off-dry quaffers through serious dry bottlings through dessert-sweet stickies. Summer is the perfect time to experiment with Rieslings; plenty of good examples from Germany, Alsace, Washington, Finger Lakes, and Australia.

Rosé. Crisp, dry pinks are a hot category in the U.S. over summer, with more shops and restaurants creating special sections to showcase pink wines seasonally. The South of France is the standard-bearer for this style, and **Chateau Grande Cassagne** is one of Bobby Kacher's flagships, in the Costières de Nîmes region.

Roussanne. Native to the Rhône Valley, this lesser-known grape, like Viognier before it, is starting to thrive in California, where Bonterra is among several wineries harnessing its exotic, rich fruit without sacrificing its underlying zip.

Rueda. Perhaps Spain's *next* hot white, this delightfully spry and well-balanced blend of Verdejo, Sauvignon Blanc, and native Viura sports juicy fruit and nice tang. No oak, no problem. Las Brisas (Spanish for "the breezes") is one reliable brand.

Sauvignon Blanc. This aggressive green grape's secret weapon is a firm backbone of acidity. Sometimes ultra-citrusy (New Zealand), sometimes flinty (Pouilly-Fumé), tangy dry SB seems to taste even better ice cold on a hot day.



Wine's Next Wave