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Column: Arbor Vinous

Everyday wines for summertime

By [Joel Goldberg](#)

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A couple of months back, this column took former Ann Arbor City Council member Steve Kunselman to task for his hesitance to seek advice on moderately priced red wines to try.

It's even possible that the word "chicken" came into play.

Chalk up a victory. Steve advises me that he's retrieved his inner wine curiosity, and now makes his presence felt at more than one local store, regularly requesting red recommendations.

I hope his resolve extends to white wine, too. With warmer days here, many wine drinkers dial back their red consumption and begin eyeing some chilled whites to sip on the deck or accompany lighter summertime meals.

The operative word in the previous paragraph: chilled. As in "not cold." Or, as [Cellarnotes](#) succinctly put it, "In general, we tend to drink our white wines too cold and our red wines too warm."

White wine straight from the fridge – around 35 degrees – sequesters all its aromatics and much of its flavor behind the cold. Think: moderately alcoholic, slightly acidic ice water. Not exactly yummy.

But a few degrees higher, in the 45 to 50 zone, all the scents and tastes come out to play. That's why, at white wine tastings, you'll frequently spot a crowd of strange-looking people, bowls of their glasses cupped in hot, sweaty palms, swirling the wine to warm it up.

This month's white tasting parallels the reds from two months back: high value, less formulaic wines in the \$10 range, suggested by local retailers. Based on their feedback, we ratcheted up the top of the price range by a buck, to \$13.

This time, my request for retailer recommendations also cloaked a slightly more nefarious purpose. Two weeks back, importer Bobby Kacher launched a minor mondo-vino controversy when he [told must-read blogger Tyler Coleman](#) (a.k.a. Dr. Vino), that it was close-to-impossible to find high quality U.S. wines selling under \$12 – exactly the range of our tastings.

So it seemed informative to unobtrusively measure the national origins of the wines that our savvy Ann Arbor retailers were suggesting as their best bets for the money.

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The short answer: they're not from around here.

Among the 24 combined entries in our red and white tastings, just three were made in the U.S., as opposed to nine from France and six from Italy. This month, the Vinous Posse also got to sample wines from Austria, Portugal and South Africa (though none – in either tasting – from Australia or New Zealand).

In other words, Kacher may be onto something.

The Vinous Posse's top-rated white bottles come from countries that don't necessarily trip off the tongue when we think of high quality wine – South Africa's "Goats in Villages Viognier" and Portugal's Quinta da Alorna "Arintho." The Viognier – with a ★★★★★ rating we didn't expect to hand out in this price range – was suggested by Rod Johnson at Plum Market. It's one niche of a great wine marketing story that began a decade back, when Fairview Winery created the "Goats do Roam" brand, a South African wine that played off the name and style of France's Côtes-du-Rhône.

The label quickly became the best-selling South African wine in the U.S., leading to such logical brand extensions as "Goat-Roti" and "Bored Doe." It didn't hurt their reputation that the wines were actually excellent value for the money – or that the French, displaying a galling lack of humor, filed an international complaint against Fairview for trademark infringement.

(A few years back, I helped a friend, George Heritier from Detroit's wonderful [Gang of Pour](#) wine site, [assemble a fuller tale of the brand](#); his article and (now dated) reviews are still worth a read.)

Finally, a shout-out to Audree Riesterer at Whole Foods on Eisenhower Parkway, who offered two green-pedigree selections to taste – one organically produced in Austria, the other, named "Sustainable White," from Parducci in Mendocino, Calif., which bills itself as the first carbon-neutral winery in the U.S.

Though neither copped a top rating, both represent enjoyable, earth-friendly wines – at least if you overlook the energy needed to transport their weighty glass bottles to Michigan.

So What's to Drink?

Wines are rated from ★☆☆☆☆ to ★★★★★. The Vinous Posse doesn't grade on the curve, so ★★★★★ represents a decent, enjoyable bottle.

Please take a moment to scan the reviews along with the ratings – they contain lots of information about wine styles and food pairing that will help you select the right bottle for your needs.

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Label from Goats in Villages Viognier.



2007 GOATS IN VILLAGES VIOGNIER, Paarl, South Africa (Suggested by Rod Johnson, Plum Market; \$10). A great outing for this aromatic grape, as long as you're not expecting \$60 Condrieu from France's northern Rhône, where the varietal originated. Big, peachy floral nose follows up with a lusciously rich, well-balanced, mouth-filling body. "Good all the way to the gums!" said a member of the Vinous Posse. Enjoy with grilled chicken, or just savor it slowly on its own. Be sure not to serve too cold, or you'll kiss those great aromatics good-bye.



2007 QUINTA DA ALORNA "Arintho," Ribateno, Portugal (Suggested by Mark Smith, Arbor Farms; \$13). Pale green color and a honeyed nose, followed by – surprise! – some light spritziness in the mouth alongside apricot and ripe banana flavors. A great, light food wine; serving suggestions from the group included mild cheeses, grilled shrimp – especially – fresh strawberries.



2007 DOMAINE CHÊNE, Macon-Villages, France (Suggested by Dick Scheer, Village Corner; \$12). Unoaked Chardonnay grown in one of the less prestigious quarters of normally pricey Burgundy. A rich, yellow color and aromas of ripe melon lead into a silky-smooth palate with a bright acid snap on the finish. "Kick back in your Adirondack and enjoy," said one of the tasters.

2007 TERRAZZO "BIANCO," Esino, Italy (Suggested by Dick Scheer, Village Corner; \$10). A blend of 80% Verdicchio (as in the Marchetti, below) and 20% Trebbiano, from the Marche region on Italy's Adriatic coast. Light, crisp and refreshing, with a lemony minerality that begs for food. Our tasters salivated over thoughts of sipping this next to a piece of crusty, buttery garlic bread. Great summertime wine.



2008 DOMAINE DES CASSAGNOLES, Cotes de Gascogne, France (Suggested by Alex Pratt, Morgan & York; \$11). Made from Colombard and Ugni Blanc grapes in the Gascony region, south of Bordeaux and north of Spain on France's Atlantic coast. Pungent grapefruit and grassy aromas followed by a crisp, well-balanced and powerful palate, with some passion fruit notes. Would do well alongside rich, buttery foods.

2007 DRY CREEK CHENIN BLANC, Clarksburg, California (Suggested by Giri Iyengar, Everyday Wines; \$12.50). The grape's from France's Loire Valley, the growing region is inland California, east of San Francisco and south of Sacramento. And the

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wine's luscious, with ripe peach aromas, a smooth, creamy texture with stone-fruit flavors and a long finish. Nice for sipping on its own.

2008 HOFER, GRUNER VELTLINER, Niederosterreich, Austria (Suggested by Audree Riesterer, Whole Foods on Eisenhower Parkway; 1 liter bottle, \$10). One of the more unusual selections in the tasting, with Austria's Gruner Veltliner grape, from the state of Lower Austria. A grapefruit and lemon zest nose, light but round palate. People suggested serving it with manchego cheese or raw oysters. The liter bottle, with its pop-off beer cap, gives it a big bang for the buck.

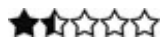
2007 KUENTZ-BAS, Alsace, France (Suggested by Alex Pratt, Morgan & York; \$13). In Alsace, they call this type of wine "Edelzwicker" – a house-blend of regional varietals like Pinot Blanc and Gewurztraminer. The latter grape shows up in delicate, floral, rosewater aromas, which one less-admiring taster termed "bubble gum." Slightly off-dry, pear flavors and a lemony acidity that dances on the tongue. Food suggestion: slices of summer sausage on hearty wheat crackers.

2007 MARCHETTI, Verdicchio dei Castelli de Jese, Italy (Suggested by Rod Johnson, Plum Market; \$12). The same grape as the Terrazzo, above, from a nearby section of Italy's Marche region, and another great-with-food selection. Rich, round mouthfeel with minerality and lemon rind; a strong presence without being overbearing. We'd enjoy it with simple but rich fish preparations, such as sea bass or pan-sautéed trout.

2007 PARDUCCI "Sustainable White," Mendocino, California (Suggested by Audree Riesterer, Whole Foods on Eisenhower Parkway; \$10). Sauvignon Blanc, Muscat Canelli, Tokai, and Viognier blend, from a producer claiming to be the first U.S. carbon neutral winery. Approachable, delicate, easy-sipping wine, very pale color and faint floral notes on the nose, with a slightly hot finish. Food pairing ideas ran in the direction of shrimp, scallop and spinach greens.



2008 DOMAINE DE BALLADE SAUVIGNON BLANC-COLOMBARD, Cotes de Gascogne, France (Suggested by Giri Iyengar, Everyday Wines; \$11.50). Our second contender from this region on France's southwest coast, this substitutes Sauvignon Blanc for Ugni Blanc. Golden straw color, initially rich, ripe and flavorful followed up with a tart grapefruit/citrus aftertaste. One taster termed it "Adult-sized lemonade." Fine with richer cheeses, but no food necessary.



2007 CHATEAU DE CARIZIERE, "Sur Lie," Muscadet, France (Suggested by Mark Smith, Arbor Farms; \$12). Made from Muscadet grapes grown near the mouth of the Loire River on France's Atlantic coast. Sharp acidity without the fruit to match, along with some funky and sulfur notes. May simply be an off bottle, but not to anyone's taste.

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About the author: Joel Goldberg, an Ann Arbor area resident, edits the [MichWine](#) website. His Arbor Vinous column for The Chronicle is published on the first Saturday of the month. If you'd like to keep up with local wine events, visit MichWine's [Ann Arbor wine calendar](#). To list your event on the calendar, submit it [here](#).