

THE WINE GUY

California zinfandels surpass cabernets in taste

My last column offered recommendations on wines from around the world that would be perfect to drink through the rest of the summer and into fall.

This time, we stay closer to home with recommendations of California wines. All wines are \$20 or less and meant for casual or everyday drinking.

While most of the wines are from familiar grapes such as cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay, there are plenty from less-familiar grape varieties and some unexpected combinations of varieties, which adds to the fun and exploration.

WHITE WINES

Chardonnay. Wines from this grape are a conundrum to me. Chardonnay is the most popular white wine in America, and producers, not surprisingly, make boatloads of it. Yet, I haven't found many chardonnays lately that deliver acceptable quality at any price level, but especially at lower prices. Maybe I'm just getting the wrong samples. If you must have a chardonnay, these were the best of the ones I tasted.

- 2005 Trinchero Family Santa Barbara County (\$10)



RICH MAURO

Gazette wine columnist

- 2004 Sebastiani Sonoma County (\$13)

- 2004 Hess Collection Napa Valley (\$19)

Sauvignon blanc. For some reason, sauvignon blanc remains one of the most underrated wines among consumers. Over the last several months of samples I have tasted, it provided a stark contrast to chardonnay's performance. I found more than ample samples of juicy, refreshing wines from all over California.

- 2005 Trinchero Family Santa Barbara County (\$10)

- 2005 Geysers Peak California (\$12)

- 2005 Lockwood Monterey County (\$12)

- 2005 Chateau Souverain Alexander Valley (\$14)

- 2003 Handley Anderson Valley (\$15)

- 2004 Niner Bootjack Ranch Paso Robles (\$15)

- 2004 Robert Pecota "L'Ar-

tiste" Napa Valley (\$15)

- 2004 Wattle Creek Mendocino County (\$17)

- 2004 J. Lohr Carol's Vineyard Napa Valley (\$18)

- 2004 Chateau St. Jean La Petite Etoile Vineyard Fume (\$20)

Pinot grigio. The popularity of pinot grigio continues to soar, and it is poised to become the second-best-selling white wine in the country. Sometimes the wine is labeled pinot gris, which is the name given in France. Although I have tasted a lot of tepid pinot grigio recently, I did find several this time that hit the mark with lively aromatics and interesting flavors.

- 2005 Rex Goliath California (\$9)

- 2004 Talus California (\$10)

- 2004 Smashed Grapes California (\$10)

- 2005 Robert Mondavi Private Selection (\$11)

- 2004 TAZ Santa Barbara Pinot Gris (\$15)

Other. For a great aperitif, try the 2005 Folie a Deux "Ménage a Trois" White Table Wine (\$10), a tasty blend of chardonnay, muscat and chenin blanc. Follow it up at dinner with the aromatic 2005 "The White Knight" Viognier Clarks-

burg (\$16), from a winery actually called The Other Guys. Finish your meal with the delicious, sweet 2002 Robert Pecota Moscato d'Andrea (\$15) Napa Valley.

RED WINES

Cabernet sauvignon. If chardonnay is the queen of white wines, cabernet sauvignon is king of reds. And it didn't fare well in my tastings, either. Go figure. Again, though, good values are out there and I found a few worth attention.

- 2004 Happy Camper California (\$9)

- 2005 Trinchero Family Lake County (\$10)

- 2003 Geysers Peak Alexander Valley (\$18)

Zinfandel. On the other hand, zinfandel has shined this summer. Zinfandel may be the underappreciated red wine counterpart to sauvignon blanc, but it outperformed all the other red wine I've tasted recently in this price category. I found numerous values that delivered bright berry fruit with a touch of spice.

- 2003 Kendall-Jackson Vintner's Reserve (\$12)

- 2003 Sebastiani Sonoma County (\$13)

- 2003 Beaulieu Vineyard Napa Valley (\$14)

- 2003 Kenwood Sonoma County (\$16)

- 2003 Wild Horse Paso Robles (\$17)

- 2003 Montevina "Terra d'Oro" Amador County (\$18)

- 2003 Handley Mendocino County (\$20)

- 2003 Dashe Dry Creek Valley (\$20)

- 2003 Quivira Dry Creek Valley (\$20)

Other. Finally, I also came across two very good rosés. The 2005 Folie a Deux "Ménage a Trois" Rosé Table Wine (\$10) is an odd combination of merlot, syrah and gewürztraminer, but it

works. The 2005 Rosenblum (\$18) Appellation Series Rose blends gamay and grenache