

805 LIVING

JULY 2010



Water, Water,
EVERYWHERE

RED, WHITE, AND NEW

Newly released wines from California's Central Coast have arrived.

Finding new wines to enjoy and share is one of the great rites of summer. The following suggestions—which only scratch the surface of what's out there—are 10 solid bottles to try right now.



JUSTIN 2009 SAUVIGNON BLANC, PASO ROBLES (\$15; justinwine.com)

If sauvignon blanc isn't the perfect summer wine, I don't know what is. Bright and lively, it tastes exactly like a July afternoon. Justin's features shades of citrus and tropical fruits, and there's a little bit of spring grass on the nose, too. Pack a picnic with this one; it's a screwtop, so skip the corkscrew.



MIDNIGHT CELLARS 2007 ZINFANDEL, PASO ROBLES (\$29; midnightcellars.com)

Paso Robles is zin-central, which is why they've been holding a Paso Robles Zinfandel Festival every March for almost two decades. It's also California's zinfandel capital because of its reputation for producing enormous wines that routinely reach above 16-percent alcohol. True to the character of the region, Midnight Cellars' zinfandel is 16.9-percent alcohol. That's huge, but it doesn't really flaunt its size. There is harmony and balance. There are dark and spicy flavors, and tannins that lose their grip just when you need them to.



NINER 2007 SANGIOVESE, BOOTJACK RANCH, PASO ROBLES (\$24; ninerwine.com)

Winemaker Amanda Cramer once described wine-making to me as a balance between tradition and innovation. That's evident with her sangiovese, which just so happens to be my favorite Italian varietal (and quite possibly the best grape of all time). Niner's starts out structurally strong, like a true New World red, then loosens up quickly, reminding me that Italy grows sangiovese to complement the tang of tomatoes, the earthiness of basil, and the simple wonder of cheese and bread. Anyone else want pizza tonight?



TREANA 2008 WHITE, CENTRAL COAST (\$25; treana.com)

This Rhône blend (viognier and marsanne) features Monterey fruit with Paso Robles technique. Ultimately, it's got that signature California heft. But while it's deep and rich, it's not weighty; I suspect the delightful leanness results from 25 percent of the wine fermenting and aging in stainless steel instead of oak. The flavors are still full; the bouquet leans toward the stone fruit side rather than flowers or perfume.



EBERLE 2008 BARBERA, PASO ROBLES (\$26; eberlewinery.com)

Nice. That's what the host will say if you bring this to her get-together. After the second sip, she'll look at you with that genuine "I wasn't sure at first, but now I'm *really* glad I invited you to the party" expression. The plush sweetness of dark cherry and black currant puts everyone else in a good mood, too. It's a northern Italian varietal, which means truffles, artisanal cheeses, pesto, oregano, and cioppino go with it.



LONGORIA 2007 TEMPRANILLO, SANTA YNEZ VALLEY (\$36; longoriawine.com)

Fair warning: There's probably not much of this left. Tempranillo is my favorite Spanish grape (and quite possibly the best grape of all time). Longoria's fifth vintage from Santa Ynez fruit takes this great grape to new heights with touches of syrah and merlot. The combination is soft and rich (so are the tannins). There were only 270 cases produced, so like I said, there's probably not much of this left by now. Better hurry.



ZACA MESA 2006 SYRAH, SANTA YNEZ VALLEY (\$23; zacamesa.com)

Wonderful, just as it should be from a winery with more than three decades of syrah know-how. It's big but not chunky; lush and outdoorsy with hints of wild sage. Though nice on its own, it would pair nicely with foods made with rosemary and garlic, especially when cooked over a campfire.

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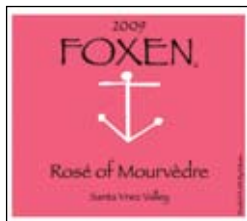
LA FENÊTRE 2008 À CÔTÉ SYRAH, 'SOUTH MESA,' SANTA BARBARA (\$24; lafenetrewines.com)

I purposefully placed two syrahs next to one another on this list because both are from Santa Barbara County, and both are excellent. But whereas Zaca Mesa's syrah made me want to enjoy the woods, this one is for a backyard evening barbecue. It's concentrated; there's more spice here, too. And it wants food—something grilled, something full-bodied, but not fussy or overly complicated.



DERBY WINE ESTATES 2006 FIFTEEN 10, PASO ROBLES (\$28; derbywineestates.com)

Last year, I wrote: "Rhône reds often overshadow their white cousins, which is a shame." In that lament, I cited Derby's White Rhône blend as an excellent example that's not to be overlooked. Allow me to introduce another Derby blend: The Fifteen 10 is elegantly structured with syrah, grenache, counoise, and mourvèdre. It reminds me of why I wrote that sentence in the first place.



FOXEN 2009 ROSÉ OF MOURVÈDRE, SANTA YNEZ VALLEY (\$25; foxenvineyard.com)

The mourvèdre grape is earthy and rustic. It lends Rhône-richness to this lively rosé. Light enough for the patio. Serious enough for the dinner party. Versatile enough for the following short list of food pairings: fajitas, baguette with butter and prosciutto, braised rabbit, grilled andouille sausage, french fries, soft goat cheese, *pâtes au pistou*, pasta with red sauce, grilled bacon-wrapped pork tenderloin, lamb with herbs, hamburgers, cheeseburgers, veggie burgers, and salade niçoise. ■

Head's Up:

Whisky Tasting, July 22

Whisky Business presents a discussion on the impact American distilleries make on the whisky industry; plus, how corn and rye whiskies differ from the malt and barley varietals made in Ireland and Scotland. There's also a sampling of eight American whiskies, for aficionados and neophytes alike.

Price is \$35 per person and includes light appetizers. The program begins at 6:30 p.m. at Eric's Restaurant inside the Palm Garden Hotel (palmgardenhotel.com) in Newbury Park. Reservations are required: 805-415-9177 or whiskybusiness@live.com.