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Hint of grassiness in sauvignon blanc

by Gil Kulers - March 23, 2006

In 1991, my wife, Eleanore, and I celebrated our honeymoon in the idyllic island nation of New Zealand. It was a somewhat odd place to celebrate because she's not a real fan of lamb. (For the uninitiated, New Zealand is the land of 4 million people and 40 million sheep. Sheep are everywhere; people not so much.) This was a bummer for me because I love lamb and we generally share our meals when we go out to dinner.

In addition to its famous lamb, New Zealand has become a sauvignon blanc juggernaut. The crisp, citrusy, melony qualities have made them the darlings of the wine world.

There is, to a greater or lesser degree, a hint of grassiness in all sauvignon blancs. Grassiness is one of those hard-to-define wine terms. It does not mean the wine tastes like someone threw a handful of clippings from the back of the Toro into

the bottle. It's more like a green herbaceous quality that, once it's pointed out, you get it. Eleanore can't stand this trait in sauvignon blancs. This, too, is a bummer for me because most nights we like to share a bottle of wine over dinner.

Recently, I quietly slipped a 2004 Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc (one of several pseudonyms for sauvignon blanc) in Eleanore's glass at dinner. As we hashed out the highlights of our family's day, I casually asked Eleanore what she thought of the wine. "I love it! It's really refreshing! What is it?"

Don't you just love those spousal gotcha moments? "Well, it's a sauvignon blanc from Sonoma County," said I, trying not to be overtly smug. "I thought you didn't like sauvignon blanc?"

To cut Eleanore some slack, I have to admit the grassy quality of the Dry Creek is merely hinted at in the background. In the foreground — with a searing spotlight on

it — were crisp lemon and lime flavors augmented by a mineral-like, slate quality that makes you feel like you're tasting something of the earth. Increasingly, this grassy quality has become a bit less evident in sauvignon blancs, especially those from California and New Zealand.

Dry Creek, which has been making this varietal since 1972, produces two other excellent sauvignon blancs. Their only drawback is that they're relatively pricey, at \$25 a bottle. They are the Estate Fumé Blanc DCV3 and Taylor's Vineyard Sauvignon Musqué — another name for sauvignon blanc.

So while I'm still working on getting more lamb on our table, I think the Kulers household may see a bit more sauvignon blanc in the future.

Wine Recommendations:

2003 Dry Creek Vineyard Taylor's Vineyard Musqué Sauvignon Blanc, Dry Creek Valley: "certainly Dry Creek's most elegant sauvignon blanc. This wine is all about minerals, with an earthy quality that gives and takes with fresh, ripe limes, grapefruit and pineapple. Soon to be available in the Atlanta market." — *Two thumbs way up*

2003 Dry Creek Vineyard Estate Fumé Blanc DCV3, Dry Creek Valley: "everything the regular Dry Creek fumé blanc is, plus a slightly fuller, creamier texture, plus delectable creamy, lingering flavors of mango and ripe peach." — *Two thumbs way up*

2004 Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc, Sonoma County: "all the fruit, zesty acidity and mineral qualities, but none of the overwhelming grassiness. This wine is all about shellfish and would be a great offering to greet guests with before dinner." — *Two thumbs up*

