

**Dry Creek Vineyard
2005 Fumé Blanc**

The Press

DEMOCRAT

by Virginie Boone

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Winter great for sauvignon blanc

Acidity and complexity of this white wine
make it crazy good with food such as crab

Many of us mistakenly think of white wine as a spring and summer quaff, perhaps opening our mind for a moment to take in a bottle or two around the end-of-year holiday meals. But sauvignon blanc is a complex white with inviting acidity and is such the right partner for so many foods, be they procured in winter, spring, summer or fall. This time of year, pair it with crab and involuntary tears of joy may stream from your eyes.

Meant to be drunk well-chilled, most sauvignon blanc is also reasonably priced and enjoyed within a year or two of release.

"I constantly recommend sauvignon blanc because it offers great stylistic range, excellent availability and value for the money," master sommelier Andrea Immer Robinson said. "And it's delicious. Sauvignon blanc's herbaceous character gives it great food affinity."

California

Sauvignon blanc has been a confusing proposition in California, thanks in part to semantics, a case in which Robert Mondavi Winery in the early days developed its own marketing language to sell the stuff, combining the blanc from sauvignon blanc with the fumé from pouilly-fumé to describe the sauvignon blanc it was barrel-fermenting and aging in wood.

The term fumé blanc is still found on many a bottle of California sauvignon blanc: sometimes it indicates oak aging, sometimes it doesn't, an enological non sequitur.

While sauvignon blanc is the second most widely planted white grape in California after chardonnay, we haven't always known quite what to do with it once it's off the vine. The Loire Valley, after all, has never historically been where local vintners looked for inspiration.

Until the early 1970s - that's when Dave Stare of Dry Creek Vineyard became one of the first Californians to coax high-level sauvignon blanc from Northern California ground, his inspiration derived from the Loire Valley versions he had tasted on his travels.

Recalling the Sancerres as refreshingly grassy and herbaceous, the pouilly-fumés more subtle, Stare took some classes at Davis, found an old prune orchard in Dry Creek and in 1972 began planting sauvignon blanc. At the time, local farm advisors were telling him the variety wouldn't grow well in Dry Creek.

"I ultimately decided that I needed to stick to my guns and plant what I was passionate about," Stare remembered.

Soon after, he released his first vintage of sauvignon blanc, eventually producing some of the best the state had ever seen from his estate vineyard known as DCV3 (Dry Creek Vineyard No. 3).

Dry Creek's DCV3 sauvignon blanc is listed by author Paul Lukacs as one of "The Great Wines of America" in his recent book on the top 40 vintners, vineyards and vintages in the country.

Lukacs writes, "(Dave Stare's) Dry Creek Vineyard fumé blanc, initially made with purchased fruit, then with more and more estate fruit, was arguably the first modern American wine made from this particular grape variety to actually taste like it."

That meant sticking to a Loire style, using cold stainless steel fermentation to produce classic herbal, grassy characteristics followed by vibrant citrus, lemon-lime and gooseberry aromas and flavors. Stare randomly went with the "fumé" name, as Mondavi had before him, thinking it would sell better, so out of favor was California sauvignon blanc at the time.

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