

Keeping a Cool Head

Some surprising whites rise to meet the season.

Has this been a summer etched in sweat? The summer when Eugene got wicked hot, sweltered — torched the tarmac, scorched sandals and generally crisped flesh. Months from now, after a mind-numbing string of sodden days and soaking nights, we'll be prepared to tilt back in our rocking chairs and revisit in recall these blistered dog days of summer '06; by then, the swampy sheets will be memorialized as some form of bliss. The human mind is always a beautiful thing, right?

Of course, hot as we got, we still had it sweet compared to, say, California: Fresno four days running at 110 degrees. Sacramento at 115 degrees?

For those blessed folk who have never lived in or passed through Sacramento when it sizzles, I can only say: Rejoice. If Dante had ever had the experience, that steaming bog would have been immortalized in *The Inferno*. OK, I know some folks might be secretly chuckling, thinking, well, that's happening to Caliphonians and it couldn't happen to a sweller bunch, but that's not Oregon nice. Too, we might oughtta remember that every time something really nasty strikes down south — earthquakes, huge fires, desert floods, heat waves — we get a scourge of new Calmigrants who drive like maniacs, drive up real estate prices, and drive us nuts when they gripe about our poverty-stricken schools, all while signing petitions to cut state spending. Hard not to see the cloud in front of that silver lining, ain't it?

Bluegene tree-huggers and environators who might opine that all those predictions of the disastrous consequences of global warming are proving all too accurate, I have to say settle down, not to worry, mere geologic glitch, all is well, "These are not the droids you're seeking. Pass in peace." Pour a nice glass of chilled white wine, sear some rain-sodden back-flesh and try not to think so much. Try reciting the GWB mantra on warming: "Adapt."

Might help if you adapted to a new white wine. Never thought I'd write these words, but try an Italian white. Sure, most wine-savvy sippers know that for bang on the wine buck it's hard to beat Italian reds; very good Chianti classico, for instance, is still underpriced relative to, say, French Burgundy or Bordeaux, and decent Montepulciano d'Abruzzo can appear on your table for mildly moderate prices. But the Italians have traditionally regarded white wines as little better than water, and treated them accordingly (and those folks have been doing truly nasty stuff in their waters for centuries). Lately, though, new winemaking techniques have been applied even to the whites, sometimes with truly surprising results.

Take **Marchetti Tenuta del Cavaliere 2004 Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi**

(\$15). That's a mouthful of label, but the keywords are Marchetti, family name of serious wine people who make small batches of handcrafted beauties, and verdicchio (ver-DEEK-io), a white of the Marche region (west coast, bit north of Rome) that used to be regarded as whatever might be the Italian word for blah. But when the grapes are given a little longer hand-time on the vine, some lovely flavors emerge (pear notes, stony accents) backed by crisp acidity and just enough residual sugar, hardly more sweetness than a kiss, to soften the texture and round the fruit. Marche is a seafood zone; cool this lovely down, then put it next to, say, cold crab salad, chill mos' fine.

After years of beating my widdle drum about the charms of serious rosé (and I certainly wasn't alone), we're seeing a gush in the markets. Twenty-some varieties appeared this year, many of them delish, in a variety of styles — as it should be. Some folk like the tangy, citrus tartness of classic French rosé, especially those from Provence and

the Rhone Valley (yum!); some like the spicy cherry fruit of Spain; I happen to prefer the soft cherry/strawberry/pepper rosés of Oregon, particularly rosé of pinot noir. I've written up some winners — Meriwether, Territorial — to which I'd add **Sokol Blosser 2005 Rosé of Pinot Noir, Dundee Hills** (\$10), so fresh and pretty and bright, so adaptable to summer supping.

Normally, of course, high heat and big reds rarely make happy smiles, but this summer we whipped up some Asian BBQ for our friends Rob and Lisa Atkins, and they showed up with a wine label I'd never seen: **Waving Tree 2004 Barbera** (\$15) from the Washington side of the Columbia Valley. Color was dark purple, body full and round, flavors of dark plums, black currants, woodsmoke, pepper. Like verdicchio, Italy's barbera grapes/wines historically got little to no respect; it was the lovable little wine that vineyard workers drank at lunch while working on the great nebbiolo-based barolos and barbarescos. Lately, winemakers in the Piedmont have been treating barbera with more honor, and the wines have leapt in quality and found new fans in the world market. Winemakers in California and Washington have also experimented with the grape, putting serious effort into finding barbera's character in New World soils and locales, with uneven but promising results. Waving Tree was one of the good results. You won't find them in our market, so try www.wavingtreewinery.com Tip: serve barbera with crunchy bread and good salami, a natch match.

Meanwhile, though, it's still hot, gonna get hotter. We're gonna need all the cool heads we can muster. A sip of savory wine should help. Like prayer, like hope, it sure can't hurt.

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