

Racy whites for summer provide a pop of acidity



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Like Eskimos and snow, wine geeks have plenty of words for acidity.

There's tart (a positive descriptor) and sour (negative). There's crisp (like green apples) and lemony (like lemons). There's lean (and its opposite flabby, i.e. a wine lacking acidity); bright, steely, austere, racy and nervosite (French for nervous energy). Finally, there's just plain acidic (not to be confused with acetic, indicating the wine is turning into vinegar.)

The winemaker's lexicon adds wine's organic acids -- tartaric, malic and citric. It's one of wine's little miracles that the grape is unique among fruits in high acid levels, which protect young juice from bacteria throughout fermentation and maturation.

To you and me though, the importance of wine's acid is pleasure, a pop! on the palate that refreshes taste buds, sets the mouth to watering and signals the tummy that food is on the way.

In France, Burgundy is famous for 100 percent Chardonnay wines with steely acidity that slices through the region's buttery dishes and creamy cow's milk cheeses like a well-sharpened blade. Serve Burgundy's recipes such as Escargots Bourguignon (snails in butter) and creamy cow's milk cheese including Epoisses and Chaource with white Burgundy from subregions Chablis, Macon and the Cote d'Or.

Creamy goat's milk cheese is a specialty of France's Loire Valley. To refresh the palate from unctuous Crottin de Chavignol and all goat's milk cheese and to add lemony acidity to everything fished the Loire -- France's longest river -- serve a 100 percent Loire Sauvignon Blanc including:

Sancerre, Château de Sancerre (Loire, France): Sauvignon Blanc's characteristic flavors of fresh herbs and grapefruit enhanced by the region's minerality and bright acidity for a rich complement to regional favorites including goat's milk cheese, oysters, crayfish, salmon and pike. (About \$25.)

In Italy, Alpine regions have turned millions of drinkers into wine lovers with light, bright wines including Pinot Grigio, now America's Number Two-selling grape (after Chardonnay.) A longtime critic and consumer favorite is:

Pinot Grigio, Kettmeir (Alto-Adige-Sudtirol, Italy): Aromas like an orchard in spring bloom with flavors like biting into a just-ripe pear, freshly-pulled from the tree. The wine's tangy acidity will perk up international antipasti including fried seafood and veggies, cured meats and a variety of dips from guacamole to Greek taramasalata. (About \$21.)

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