

Paste

52 Wines in 52 Weeks: Blending Roussanne and Marsanne for Fall

By Amy Glynn



Well, I got a little behind in my wine-a-week thing because narrowing Chardonnay down to a reasonable list of any kind turned out to be a long-term situation. So let's take advantage of a natural opportunity to catch up! It's getting into fall, and perhaps you'd like a white wine that jumps Labor Day weekend, something fall-ish. Something with a little gravity, aromatic without being about astringency, more "satisfying" than "refreshing," something with rich flavors, waxy or unctuous texture, and the lavish aromatics of the fall harvest season. The Rhone Valley has your six, guys.

In the US, we tend to be varietal-focused folks. Wines are not named for the place they're made, they're named for the grape they're made from. But there is a reason why some of the world's most emblematic (and delicious) wines are blends. Like people, no one grape can do everything, and often, partnerships make everyone stronger.

The dominant white wines of the Rhone region are a great example. Each of them *can* make delicious 100% varietal wines. Each of them might not. They have complementary strengths and

drawbacks...almost as if they were somehow *meant* to be together. So this list includes some varietal iterations of the Rhone whites, and some blends.

Marsanne: This tinted grape can over-ripen and become “flabby” if it is not kept in check. This is one reason why it’s so often combined with its more acerbic friend Roussanne. When it is handled well, it creates full-bodied wines with notes of pear, honey, hazelnut, baking spice and quince. (When young, peaches sometimes pop up.) With age it sometimes develops more concentrated nut flavors and a certain “oily” mouthfeel.

Roussanne: The name of this grape means “russet;” though a “white” wine grape, the skin of the berry is actually pronouncedly rusty (making it an excellent candidate for skin-contact “orange” or ramato wine). Roussanne is a slightly fussy grape to grow (it’s susceptible to mildew and pests) but when handled well it produces full-bodied, spicy wines with incredibly floral noses. It shares the Marsanne affinity for pears and honey. Where Marsanne has a tendency to be flabby, Roussanne has a certain predisposition to be very acidic. Happily, blending them is a balancing act with beautiful results.

Be on the lookout for any and all of these. The list is far from comprehensive. In fact, there are relatively few French wines on this list, which just goes to show you where this particular person-with-an-opinion has been tasting recently. Trust me, you could parachute into Chateauneuf-du-Pape or anywhere in the Rhone region and never stop being amazed and surprised. This family of wines could keep you busy for years. Here are the ones that happened to have grabbed my attention lately.

13 Bottles to Try

Preston “Madame Preston” (Dry Creek, CA \$24)

A Rhone blend from the heart of Zin country and highly addictive. (Also if you are within striking distance of this winery I can confirm there is no better place for a picnic.) Rounded, spicy, balanced, and a wine likely to convert people who claim they don’t like white wine. It’s honeyed and stony at the same time, with heady white florals, a mid-palate heavy on hazelnut and tangerine, a little oakiness and a wet rock finish. It’s a super gracious dinner guest that will go with everything, and it’s a pleasure as an aperitif too.

Quivira Roussanne-Viognier (Dry Creek, CA \$34)

Very restrained and steely for a Roussanne from a place where daytime temps get pretty hot. Unfurling layers of spice, dry grass, tropical fruits, orchard fruits, vanilla, more spice, white flowers-not necessarily in that order, what I am saying is that within that restrained presentation there is a lot of submerged complexity. When wine nerds talk about “tension” this is what they mean. And it is a compliment. Quivira’s a treasure and they just kinda don’t make bad wine. But even in that context, this one is a little special.

<https://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2018/09/52-wines-in-52-weeks-blending-roussanne-and-marsanne.html>