



Fill your glass with liquid sunshine

Sauvignon Blanc, the ultimate summertime patio wine

With spring on the horizon, we’re looking ahead to fresh, fruit-driven wines that go into the fridge and offer refreshment on a hot day, and no wine – except maybe rosé – does it better than Sauvignon Blanc.

With its racy acidity, citrus and tropical fruit qualities, along with grassy and herbal characteristics, it just screams the universal satisfaction “ahhh” with each sniff and sip.

So what makes Sauvignon Blanc the very definition of sunshine in a glass? Well, for starters, it could be all those descriptors above. There’s also that pale-yellow colour that reflects and disperses the sunlight through the glass in a way only Savvy B can. The diffusion factor is an optical nod to the sun and it plays off the wine, giving it a multitude of rays and practically shim-



Michael
Pinkus

mering in the glass.

These days, those who really like Sauvignon Blanc think mainly of the New Zealand style, but while it is bright and citrusy, it can also be a little off-putting to some.

The most popular version is from the Marlborough region, mostly characterized by under-ripe fruit that leans heavily on the three Gs: grapefruit, grassy and gooseberry.

There are also herbal characteristics and – this might sound funny, but trust me it’s

a thing – aromas of cat pee. This led one producer to call its wine “Cat’s Pee on a Gooseberry Bush.” In any other wine, such an aroma would signal a fault in winemaking and/or the cat having done its business in the batch, but when it comes to Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc it is coveted.

But fear not folks: Marlborough is not the only place in New Zealand where Sauvignon Blanc is made or, for that matter, the only maker of the mighty Savvy B wines.

While the Loire Valley is the traditional home of the Sauvignon Blanc grape, New Zealand has seized that mantle over recent decades.

Similarly there is a long list of countries that have wrestled other grapes away from the grasp of the French: California with Chardonnay; Argentina with Malbec; and



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Australia with Syrah, turning it into Shiraz in the process. Ontario got into the act by taking Cabernet Franc. And, if you put your mind to it, many other regions have even absconded with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Sauvignon Blanc is popular all over the world, thanks to the fame the Kiwis brought to it. Much in the same way in which Shiraz had its day in the sun because of the Aussies – everybody copied the name but could not produce the style – the New Zealand Marlborough-style is often imitated but rarely duplicated (see Chile) and the grape name appearing on the label will not always dictate the style you are getting in the bottle.

South Island, where Marlborough is located, is a cool climate region – like all of New Zealand. Warmer climates, such as California, South Africa and Argentina, often make a richer, fuller style of Sauvignon Blanc that accentuates the more tropical aspect of the grape. These have notes of peach and passion fruit, which means you're not always stuck with grass clippings and cat urine.

Then there are other regions in New Zealand, such as Martinborough or Nelson, that produce less citrusy and more mineral-driven wines.

So when the patio furniture comes out of hibernation, remember to reach for a bottle of liquid sunshine and be ready to experiment. You might find you like one style over another, or that you just dig the great flavours of Sauvignon Blanc in all its incarnations. Either way, it will be worth the effort.

Trius 2016 Sauvignon Blanc (\$15.95 - #221804) – Ontario

This is some benchmark work in the Sauvignon Blanc department for Ontario. It hits all the right notes with very little drawback: grapefruit zest, guava and floral with good acidity backing it all. It's light, refreshing and a wine that continues to give something new with each bottle opened; at this price, it remains one of the best value Savvy B's in Niagara.

Te Awa 2017 Left Field Sauvignon Blanc (\$18.95 - #487496) – New Zealand

This vineyard is in Nelson, just north of Marlborough, so the flavour and aromas are different but in such a good way. Fresh lime with hints of tropical fruit and some floral character makes this an easy recommend for the price.

Featherstone 2016 Sauvignon Blanc (\$17.95 - #89011) – Ontario

Featherstone has added a barrel-fermented element to their usually fresh and lively tank-made Sauvignon Blanc and has raised the wine up to another level. The nose is tropical with hints of floral; the palate shows a little weight, due to that barrel, but has also kept that great acidity intact. There's the usual grassy, grapefruit elements plus there's guava for added fun.

Mohua 2016 Sauvignon Blanc – coming in March (~\$19.95) – New Zealand

Check Vintages for this export-only brand from Peregrine winery. It is from a Marlborough vineyard but not the “Marlborough style.” It has a juicy middle with tropical notes and a touch of that tell-tale grassiness.

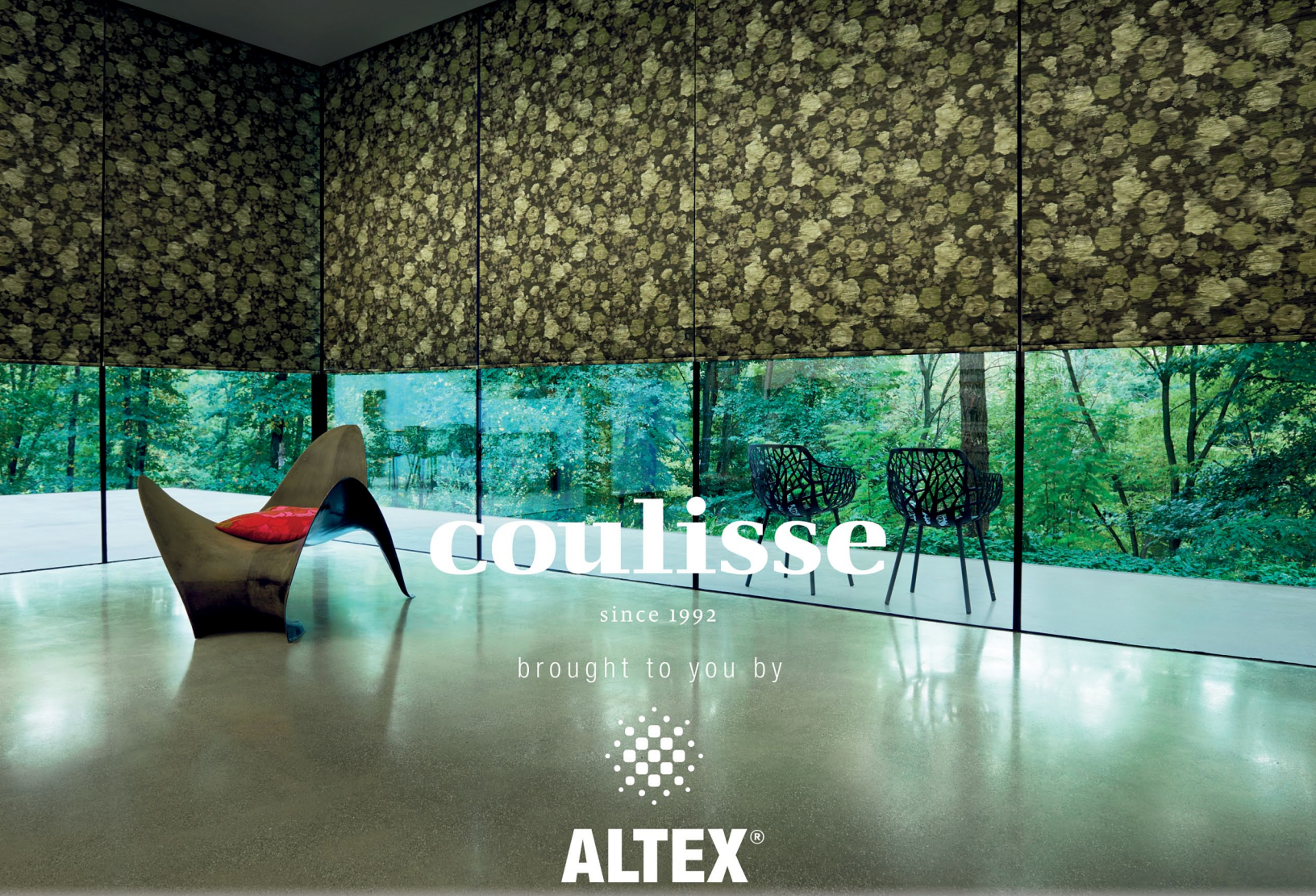
Hidden Bench 2015 Fumé Blanc (\$29.45 - #68825) - Ontario

Some think that when you put Sauvignon Blanc in barrels – fumé – it mutes the natural aromatics of the grape. Others like that it brings the wine closer to Chardonnay territory. This version might have a little too much toasty oak, but it does seem to play well with the spiced-tangerine, pineapple and grapefruit zest.

SAUVIGNON BLANC FUN FACTS

- The name Sauvignon Blanc means “wild white.”
- Sauvignon Blanc is the parent grape of one of the world's most popular red varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, which was created in the 18th century by crossing of Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc.
- Most Sauvignon Blanc is not created to age, so drink up.

Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada. Follow him on Twitter at @thegrapeguy.



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