

SE Good Taste
HD The **wine** that stops the world
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DRINKS

The global popularity of sauvignon blanc means it now has its own day, writes John Lewis.

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REGULAR readers of this column will know I'm no great fan of the variety, but Friday is International Sauvignon Blanc Day and it is impossible to ignore the grape's extraordinary global popularity.

The day will be celebrated with online and live events beginning in New Zealand and following the sun with lunches and tastings in Melbourne, **Hong Kong**, London, Toronto, Canada, and ending 43 hours later at Twitter Headquarters in San Francisco.

People around the world will be able to participate in a Twitter conversation by using the hashtag #SauvBlanc.

Sauvignon blanc originated in France and in its native land it is arguably seen at its best in the Loire Valley.

There are major plantings in California, South Africa and Australia, but it is New Zealand, and more particularly the South Island's Marlborough region, that dominates worldwide sales of "savvy blanc".

It is amazing to recall that 36 years ago the undistinguished German muller-thurgau variety provided the bulk of New Zealand dry whites and Marlborough had few surviving **wine** grape vines from plantings made in the 1870s.

Montana, the giant among NZ **wine** companies, established the first of a new generation of Marlborough vineyards on the outskirts of Blenheim in 1973.

The bulk of these vines were muller-thurgau. These failed, prompting Montana to try sauvignon blanc - a move that now sees 20,429 hectares of New Zealand's 35,733 hectares of vineyard planted to sauvignon blanc, producing 228,781 tonnes of the total 2013 grape crush of 336,337 tonnes.

The variety's supporters praise its crisp, intense, pungent, aromatic, gooseberry, capsicum, kiwifruit, green pea and herbs and spices characters.

David Thomas, **wine** writer for Britain's Punch magazine, hailed the Cloudy Bay sauvignon blancs as "New Zealand's finest export since Sir Richard Hadlee".

The World Atlas of **Wine**, by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson, declared that Marlborough sauvignon blancs "opened a Pandora's box of flavour that no one could ignore and, more importantly, no other part of the world seems able to replicate".

On the other hand, Len Evans regarded sauvignon blanc as "a weed".

Melbourne **wine** writer Jenni Port declared that the sauvignon blanc grape was "screamingly herbaceous, usually revealing little more than ghostly under-ripe flavours" and other critics have likened its impact to "cat's pee on a gooseberry bush".

Whatever your opinion, the fact remains that New Zealand international exports of sauvignon blanc **wine** were worth \$1 **billion** in 2012-13. The Kiwis hold a 39 per cent share of the British sales of sauvignon blanc, which is the most popular variety in the British off-licence **wine** trade.

In Australia two out of every three bottles of sauvignon blanc purchased are from New Zealand.

The Auckland-based Delegat's **wine group**'s Oyster Bay sauvignon blanc is the top-selling white **wine brand** in Australia.

In response many Australian **wine** companies have included Marlborough sauvignon blancs in their portfolios and/or have become distributors of NZ wines.

And they have boosted Australian production of sauvignon blanc to a 2013 grape crush of 98,212 tonnes from national plantings of 6927 hectares.

So, in recognition of International Sauvignon Blanc Day, here's a selection of current-release sauvignon blancs from varied locations:

Ra Nui 2013 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, \$27

Ra Nui owner-winemaker Steve Hotchin runs his vineyard in Marlborough's Wairau Valley under organic principles, using no toxic chemicals, herbicides or pesticides.

Here he has produced a **wine** of admirable freshness and texture.

It is pale straw and has ginger blossom and nettle scents.

Crisp citrus flavour comes through on the front of the palate and kiwifruit, star anise and flint characters join in on the middle palate.

Mineral-edged acid displays at the finish.

The Ra Nui wines are distributed in Australia by the Hunter-based Tyrrell's family **wine company** and are available in stores and restaurants.

Steve Hotchin was one of the founders of the Mount Riley **brand** at Marlborough in 1994. He **sold** his **stake** in 2002 to establish Ra Nui, three kilometres south of Blenheim township.

DRINK WITH: duck and pistachio terrine with pickled young vegetables

AGEING: three years

RATING: * * * * 1/2

Napa Cellars 2012 Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc, \$24

Imported by South Australia's Angove family **wine company**, this Californian white presents a bigger, less piquant face of sauvignon blanc.

It is brassy coloured and has nasturtium scents.

The front of the palate opens with pineapple flavour and the middle palate brings in lemongrass, passionfruit and herb characters.

Flinty acid and lingering tropical fruit combine at the finish.

The 2012 sauvignon blanc is available in some **wine** stores, along with two other Napa Cellars imports the \$39 2010 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon and \$29 2012 Napa Valley Pinot Noir.

Napa Cellars was founded in 1968 in the Oakville area of the Napa Valley and has been owned since 2006 by the Trinchero family.

DRINK WITH: Vietnamese spring rolls

AGEING: two years

RATING: * * * *

First Sighting 2012 Elim Sauvignon Blanc, \$18

South African rugby star and **wine** enthusiast Tiaan Strauss, who was the instigator of what is now the Six Nations **Wine** Competition, and Australian businessman Stephen Schofield have launched this **wine** on the Aussie market.

Made at the Strandveld winery in South Africa's southern-most Elim **wine** area, this 2012 sauvignon blanc is light **gold** in the glass and has grassy aromas.

Ripe gooseberry flavour features on the front of the palate and elements of guava, capsicum and herbs come forth on the middle palate.

Slatey acid holds sway at the finish.

First Sighting is a reference to Portuguese navigator Bartholomeu Dias's 1487-88 voyage around the tip of Africa.

The Strauss-Schofield-owned Africape Wines says it is our largest independent importer of South African wines, beers and ciders.

DRINK WITH: prosciutto and melon

AGEING: drink now

RATING: * * * *

Stella Bella 2013 Margaret River Sauvignon Blanc, \$24

Here's a multi-faceted Margaret River **wine** that is olive green-tinted straw and has lavender aromas.

Intense tropical fruit salad flavour dominates the front of the palate and ruby grapefruit, dragon fruit and mineral characters meld with touch of cashew oak on the middle palate.

Lemony acid enlivens the palate at the finish.

It can be found in some **wine** stores and on stellabella.com.au.

Stella Bella was founded in 1996 by winemakers Janice McDonald and Stuart Pym and Stuart remains as senior winemaker. The venture is now under private **company** ownership and has 88 hectares of vineyard and a winery on the Brockman Highway at Karrindale, producing wines for the Stella Bella, Suckfizzle, Skuttlebutt and Serie Luminosa labels.

DRINK WITH: pan-fried Atlantic salmon with asparagus and oranges

AGEING: four years

RATING: * * * * 1/2

Domaine Chandon 2013 Yarra Valley Sauvignon Blanc, \$25

This classy white is only available at the cellar door of Domaine Chandon, 727 Maroondah Highway, Coldstream, or at chandon.com.au.

It is light **gold** with brassy tinges and the nose has peach blossom and asparagus scents.

Vibrant citrus flavour zips onto the front of the palate and the middle palate introduces boysenberry, lime zest and spice characters.

River stones acid refreshes the taste buds at the finish.

Domaine Chandon was launched in the Yarra Valley in 1986 to produce sparkling **wine** and premium-quality, cool-climate still wines. The venture is wholly owned by Moët Hennessy, the French luxury **wine** and spirits **company**, which is a key **business group** of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH).

DRINK WITH: smoked salmon, leek and dill frittata

AGEING: three years

RATING: * * * * 1/2

Cape Mentelle 2013 Georgiana Sauvignon Blanc, \$20

Like Domaine Chandon and New Zealand's Cloudy Bay, Margaret River's Cape Mentelle is part of the giant French Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy **group**.

The unwooded 100 per cent sauvignon blanc Georgiana wines provide an interesting contrast with the Cape Mentelle Wallcliffes, which combine sauvignon blanc and semillon and are matured in French oak barriques.

This 2013 Georgiana is lime green-tinted pale straw and has musk scents.

Crisp, elegant cumquat flavour zings onto the front palate and pineapple, green apple and mineral characters come together on the middle palate.

The finish displays steely acid.

It's widely available in fine **wine** stores and at capementelle.com.au.

DRINK WITH: salad of baby octopus and squid

AGEING: three years

RATING: * * * * 1/2

Taltarni 2012 T Series Sauvignon Blanc, \$17

Grapes from the cool-climate Victorian Pyrenees and Tasmania **Coal** River Valley produced this vibrant, green-**gold** savvy blanc.

It has scents of lime blossom and green peas and brings passionfruit flavour to the front palate.

The middle brings in lychee, melon, green capsicum and restrained savoury oak and finishes with flinty acid.

The **wine** comes from the Taltarni winery at Moonambel in Victoria's Pyrenees area. It is owned by American businessman John Goelet, who also controls the Clover Hill sparkling **wine** operation in Northern Tasmania, the prestigious Clos du Val in California's Napa Valley and the Domaine de Nizas in the Languedoc area of France.

DRINK WITH: chicken and mushroom vol-au-vent

AGEING: three years

RATING: * * * * 1/2

Omrah 2013 Great Southern Sauvignon Blanc, \$21

From Western Australia's Mount Barker-based Plantagenet operation, this zippy drop is pale lemon in the glass and has honeysuckle scents.

Lively kiwifruit flavour shows on the front of the palate and elements of lime curd, herb and slate chime in on the middle palate.

Mineral-edged acid refreshes at the finish.

At **wine** stores, plantagenetwines.com and at the Albany Highway, Mount Barker, cellar door.

DRINK WITH: tomato tarte tartin with labna and rocket salad

AGEING: drink now

RATING: * * * *

top shelf

Angullong 2013 Orange Sauvignon Blanc, \$20

The Crossing family's Orange Region Angullong venture has a fine reputation for its sauvignon blancs and the 2010 version of this **wine** won the trophy for the best young sauvignon blanc at the 2010 NSW **Wine** Awards.

In this line-up the Angullong 2013 gets my vote as tops on taste and value.

It is straw-hued and has enticing jasmine scents.

The front palate introduces juicy gooseberry flavour and pineapple, preserved lemon and apple peel characters join in on the middle palate.

Gunmetal acid holds sway at the finish.

Buy it on angullong.com.au or at the cellar door in village of Millthorpe, on the outskirts of Orange.

From 1950 the Crossings ran their property on the slopes of Mount Canobolas as a sheep and cattle station and diversified into winegrowing in 1998.

DRINK WITH: prawn and preserved lemon bruschetta

AGEING: three years

RATING: * * * * 1/2

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