



These white value wines are, from left: 2012 Nisia Verdelho; 2012 Ti Point Sauvignon Blanc; 2012 Cave de Lugny Les Charmes Chardonnay; and 2012 Lou Coucardié Blanc Rousillon/Viognier.

White Value Wines

IT HAS BEEN SEVERAL YEARS since I wrote about my favorite value wines. As we finally bid farewell to one of the Midwest's coldest and snowiest winters on record, I want to profile the best value and high-quality white wines I have discovered since my last such article.

My wine find of 2013, including all wines from all countries, all colors, all varietals, and any price, is a fantastic white wine made from the Verdelho grape, indigenous to Spain. For those who do not know the grape, it is a medium-bodied wine, closer to a theoretical blend of a dry Riesling, a high-quality Pinot Grigio from Friuli, and an Albariño and an unoaked Chardonnay. This particular Verdelho, Nisia 2012, is remarkable because it is made from 55-year-old vines which translates to a noticeable nose and taste of minerality. It is dry on the finish, but has ample fruit (caramelized white citrus and tropical fruit blossoms) which display well on the apparently unoaked, natural finish. This ample minerality helps produce a wine with

a lot of complexity and a lovely finish. It is a very food friendly wine, but also one which is great to drink without food.

While this grape is grown in a few other countries, it seems to express itself best in Rueda, Spain. It pairs well with many species of fish, lightly spiced pork and chicken, and many vegetable

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dishes, as well as salads. Serve this wine at about 50 F while you watch the sun set and maybe you won't remember this past winter. Over the past 10 months I have sold many hundreds of cases of Nisia so it was fitting that in February 2014, the *Wine Spectator* announced that this wine was in the top five wine finds from Spain for 2013. I have served

it to more than one hundred people who care for wine and it has been well received by almost all. No one can believe a wine of such quality can be purchased for under \$12, which is why this is my wine find of 2013.

Although it has been sold by Costco since the 2005 vintage, another great wine buy is the Ti Point Sauvignon Blanc. I have visited many of the most famous wineries in New Zealand and although it retails for only \$8, I believe it is one of the best New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs I've had. Typical of most New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs, it is alive with the smell and taste of citrus and tropical fruits and zings with acidity. With bruschetta made from my garden's tomatoes, it remains my favorite wine to accompany this summer treat. It also goes well with many light fish and lots of shellfish dishes. Served very chilled on a hot, sultry day, it seems to be the perfect antidote.

For Chardonnay drinkers, I've recently discovered a great buy. It is Cave de Lugny, Les Charmes

Mâcon-Lugny (single vineyard Chardonnay from Burgundy). This wine is a fabulous choice for those who prefer an unoaked or no apparent oaked Chardonnay. The acidity is high enough to be a good food wine, but is great by itself. The nose detects apple blossom, and lime flowers with a hint of almond. Although only \$12, it tastes as if it's worth much more. This pairs very well with many fish and shellfish dishes, lightly spiced pork or veal entrees, and certainly makes for a great afternoon sipper.

Finally, I've saved the best for last. My wine find of 2012 was Lou Coucardié Blanc from Costières-de-Nîmes, produced by Michel Gasier. I found this wine late in 2012 and was able to secure all of the 2009 and 2010 vintages (only 240 bottles of each). This blend was 80 percent Roussanne, 10 percent Viognier, and 10 percent Grenache Blanc. After buying a large amount of each year, I called several knowledgeable wine friends who bought the rest. I was able to work with Costco's wine buyer to get all of the 2011 (same blend) and 2012, which came to the Midwest. Almost all of each of the four vintages has been sold from the Costco Lake Zurich store. This wine, according to Robert Parker, "has a personality similar to Château de Beaucastel's famed 100 percent Roussanne cuvée of Châteauneuf-du-Pape." (*Wine Advocate*, June 2011). In an interview with wine writer Lettie Teague in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2013, Robert Parker stated that the favorite wine of his life is the 1996 Château de Beaucastel Blanc VV. Unlike his favorite wine, which is practically unavailable to all except the world's top restaurants, Lou Coucardié Blanc is available, at least as this is being written in mid-March for \$20. The 2012 is a different blend (59 percent Roussanne and 41 percent Viognier), which translates into a slightly richer wine than the three previous vintages. This wine has a big mouthfeel (think olive oil consistency). As noted by the producer on the back label, the nose captures a multitude of surprising scents – white flowers, beeswax, and violets. This wine pairs well with rich foods and sauces and is 'bigger' than many red wines, and thus a good choice for a non-red wine drinker if robust foods are being served. This wine is so fantastic that you must experience it before checking out.

I hope you experience all four of these wines this summer and if any are out of stock they are all released over the summer months so try the next release based on their track records. In closing, the two white wines I reviewed in the last article remain outstanding choices each year the Eclat de Sauvignon, a Sauvignon Blanc from Bordeaux, and the Pazo de Señoráns, an Albariño from Spain at \$19.

À votre santé! U



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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