

Rhone Rangers White Wines



Regular listeners and readers will know that I am a huge fan of Rhone wines – and that definitely includes Rhone-style wines that are grown domestically.

Southern part of France. It is technically two distinct viticultural areas; the Northern Rhône Valley and the Southern Rhône Valley, that derive their specific characteristics from the unique soil compositions found throughout the Valley.

Well, the good news is you don't have to go all the way to France to sample the popular varietals from this remarkable region. Thanks to a group of passionate wine producers, the Rhone Rangers are dedicated to bringing Rhone wines a lot closer to home.

The Rhone Rangers is an organization dedicated to promoting American Rhone varietal wines from the same grapes that have flourished for centuries in France's Rhone River Valley. And a few days ago, they saddled up and rode into town to advance "the knowledge and enjoyment of the wide range of Rhone wines produced in America." Considering that there are twenty-two traditional Rhone grape varieties as approved by the French government, there is a lot of educating to be done! Fortunately, I love "homework."

Some of those varietals include red wine grapes, such as granache, mourvèdre, cinsault and carignan, to name a few.

In addition, aromatic white wine varietals, such as viognier, marsanne, roussanne, bourboulenc and grenache white are grown throughout the region.

Over twenty wineries participated in the DC tasting, with most pouring three or four different wines. As you can imagine, that resulted in a lot of tasting (and spitting). So this week, we're going to talk about some of the remarkable white wines on display and next week, we'll cover a few of the delicious red wines.

The **2012 Michael~David Winery Incognito Viognier** from Lodi, CA got its name after it was mistakenly entered into a wine competition as Roussanne (and won!) even though it's a Viognier. It's laden with scents of honeysuckle, acacia and orange blossom on the bouquet and buttery flavors of citrus fruits, green apple, apricot on the palate and despite the cold-fermentation treatment in stainless steel, the wine possesses a creamy, rich texture in the mouth. The minerally finish lends great balance and depth and would pair well with sushi. **\$20**

One of the most well-known producers in Paso Robles is Tablas Creek Vineyards from Paso Robles in California. Their **2012 Tablas Creek Vineyards Côtes de Tablas Blanc** is one of my spouse's favorite white wines. A blend of traditional Rhone Valley white grapes, it features a nose filled with nectarine, peach and honeysuckle scents. The flavors of white peach, ripe apple and creamy pear just park on the tongue, where subtle acidity supports the rich mouthfeel. Touches of wet stone and citrus add to the long finish. **\$27**

Even though the letter "Z" is at the end of the alphabet (and the end of the tasting), the **2012 Zinke Wine Company "Vogelzang Vineyard" Viognier** is first on my list! Wow – what a viognier. A seductive nose of acacia and nectarines leads to palate pleasing flavors of creamy peaches and tropical fruits. A touch of wet stone on the rich, full finish lends remarkable depth and would pair well with simply grilled shrimp or halibut. **\$24**

Joe Donelan developed a reputation for making big, powerful red wines. But the 2012 Donelan Family Winery "Venus" Roussanne from Santa Rosa, California is a study in finesse and elegance. This traditional white Rhone wine features an aromatic nose with highlighted scents of acacia flowers and wet stones while the palate reveals lush flavors of apricot, peach, nectarines and hints of mineral underpinnings. Ample acidity keeps the fruit in check and provides a clean finish. **\$45**