

Forbes

Sancerre—The Brilliance Of Sauvignon Blanc



While most wine lovers and critics would point to Burgundy as the home of the greatest examples of Chardonnay, there are some offerings in California that are world class. As for Riesling, there is a debate between the versions from Germany or Alsace as to which are superior. But when it comes to Sauvignon Blanc, few would argue that the most complex, stirring and stimulating examples are from the Loire Valley, with the finest being Sancerre.

“Sancerre, when well-made, is the purest expression of Sauvignon Blanc on earth,” says Ian Cauble, a Napa Valley-based Master Sommelier. “What sets it apart is the razor-sharp tension between its zesty citrus core, electric acidity, and intense minerality, thanks to the cooler-climate, Kimmeridgian limestone-based soils that define the region, formed over millions of years beneath a shallow sea. Replicating this unique combination outside of France is extremely difficult, though exceptional wines from specific areas of Austria, South Africa, and New Zealand can occasionally fool even the most experienced tasters.”

There is a certain purity to Sancerre that no other territory rarely achieves. The aromas and flavors of gooseberry and pear, often with notes of lime, orange crocus and passion fruit (this last descriptor is more common in warmer years such as 2023) are memorable, and even the lightest examples display impressive weight on the palate and notable persistence. While some examples are vinified without wood, in order to focus on the varietal purity, many versions are treated with oak - often second and third-year casks - to add texture and complexity to the wine.



The key to the distinctive character of any Sancerre emerges from its soils. There are three most common in the area: Caillotes (stony limestone), Terres Blanches (aka Kimmeridgian - white clay, limestone) and Silex (flint and clay). While most examples of Sancerre are a blend of two or all three of these soils, many top producers bottle these wines separately, and identify the soils on the label.

What has been extremely impressive is the way Sancerre has succeeded in the market, not only in the United States, but through many countries, such as Switzerland, Germany, the U.K, and throughout Scandinavia as well; 70% of the total production of Sancerre is sold outside of France, according to the website [Vins du Centre-Loire](#).

It should come as no surprise then how well Sancerre pairs with several types of food, and how it has become almost an essential part of most restaurant wine lists in the United States. For Cauble, “in a restaurant setting, Sancerre usually sells itself. Over the last century, it has developed a loyal global following—beginning in Paris and eventually showing up on wine lists around the world. For guests looking for a vibrant, mineral, and refreshing white, Sancerre often overdelivers—even when the producer is unfamiliar.” Cauble recommends several producers he considers as “benchmark,” including Domaine Vacheron, François and Pascal Cotat, Alphonse Mellot, Edmond Vatan, Gérard Boulay, and Lucien Crochet, noting that there are other outstanding names.

At Sophia Steak in Chicago, wine director Justin Parramore shares his thoughts on the popularity of Sancerre. “I think Chicago and the American consumer right now in general is very hot on Sancerre. It’s very approachable, people are leaning away from those very ripe New Zealand style, New World Sauvignon Blancs that in the past were very hot in the 2000s.

“I think now we’ve sort of taken that next step. We’re looking for something drier, something a little bit easier to pair with food, in my opinion. And you can find great Sancerre for fairly approachable pricing right now. Again, it’s everywhere right now; you’ve got to have Sancerre by the glass, people love it.”

As for foods that pair well with Sancerre, Cauble has his favorite recommendations. “The pairing potential is extraordinary. Goat cheese is the classic—especially Crottin de Chavignol with a fresh, toasty baguette if you want to go full Loire-on-Loire—but Sancerre also shines with raw oysters, shellfish, sushi, and Cantonese cuisine. Its bright acidity cuts cleanly through richness, while the minerality lifts and refines delicate flavors.

“Personally, I love it with cool, fresh crab, lemon, and herbs—Sancerre chilled and close by. But the most underrated pairing? Top-tier Mexican food. When fresh corn tortillas, avocado, and tangy tomatillo salsa hit the plate—especially with grilled fish or chicken—the combination is perfect. At the end of the day, Sancerre pairs beautifully with anything that leans into citrus—even tropical flavors.”

No wonder so many consumers are in love with Sancerre!

One final note, while Sancerre is best-known as a white wine, there are two other wines in the appellation: Sancerre Rouge and Sancerre Rosé. The grape used to produce these two wines, is the answer to one of the wine world’s great trivia questions; Pinot Noir is the grape for both wines. Both are very distinctive, as the Rouge is often reminiscent of a Côtes de Beaune red from Burgundy, while Sancerre Rosé is often richer than a typical Côtes de Provence rosé, and is more aligned with Tavel, one of France’s greatest versions of rosé.



Here are notes on some of the finest current releases of Sancerre:

Hubert Brochard (Chavignol)

Sancerre Les Trois Coteaux 2023 - Sourced from vineyards combining three soils: caillotes, griottes and marls. Bright, medium-deep yellow; aromas of gooseberry, pear, liniment, and hints of grapefruit and lime. Medium-full, with excellent ripeness, a rich mid-palate, very good acidity and excellent persistence; the fruit-driven finish has a distinct streak of minerality. Enjoy over the next 4-6 years. (93)

Sancerre Château du Fontaine-Audon « Terres de Silex » 2023 - Sourced from Silex soils; bright, light yellow; aromas of grapefruit, pear and yellow flowers (lily, elderflower). Medium-full, with excellent ripeness, notable harmony, good acidity and persistence. Nicely balanced, this has very good Sancerre typicity, although in a lighter style; enjoy over the next 2-4 years. (90)

Sancerre Château du Thauvenay Terres Blanches 2023 - Bright, medium deep yellow; aromas of lemon zest, pear, marigold and a hint of dried honey. Medium-bodied, this is well-balanced, with good acidity and freshness. Overall, this is straightforward, with a finish that is a touch light. Enjoy over the next 2-4 years. (88)