

A Place at the Table

Summertime cheese servings shine with Sauvignon Blanc

By Ashley Brown

Sauvignon Blanc wine is a crisp and refreshing favorite, especially during the summer months. When paired with the right cheese, it's a fresh treat that will delight your friends and family.

Although by no means a wine expert, I do know that Sauvignon Blanc is one of the world's most popular white grape varieties. The S.B. grape has been under cultivation for over a thousand years, yet like its cousin Cabernet Sauvignon, it was more likely originally a "wild" grape or "sauvage" as they say in France which is where it is believed the grape's origin lies; specifically in the Bordeaux region.

While Sauvignon Blanc is typically on the more aromatic side, its flavor profile can vary greatly depending upon a number of factors such as sunlight, heat exposure, oak treatment, and of course, soil conditions. As a result, it can be difficult to know what to expect from Sauvignon Blanc, but knowing where your Sauvignon Blanc hails from can help you maintain a little more constancy of flavor. Although today you'd be hard-pressed to find a wine region that *doesn't* produce Sauvignon Blanc, for the purposes of this article, I'll focus on an area that I have found to consistently produce delicious, high-quality Sauvignon Blanc which pairs beautiful with some of the more widely recognized (and affordable) cheeses.

In the 1980's, New Zealand emerged as a leader in Sauvignon Blanc production with their bold, citrus flavors. Today, New Zealand S.B. is still a delicious, surprisingly economical and easy to find in your local wine shop. New Zealand S.B., specifically from the Marlborough region, is particularly intense, crisp and perfect for the upcoming hot summer months. My personal, inexpensive favorite is Matua Valley, but when I want to splurge, I go for Kim Crawford. Even then, you can count on spending less than \$20 per bottle!

Although the Sauvignon Blanc grape is most pairing-friendly with a broad range of goat and sheep's milk cheese, there are a surprising few cow's milk cheeses that work with it particularly well. But, if you're like me and have a penchant for hot apple pie smothered with a melted slice of cheddar cheese, then pairing New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc with sharp English or Wisconsin cheddar is for you. I tend to think of this pairing primarily when I want an easy-to-pack snack for a romantic picnic or day on the Lake.

For more elegant, visually appealing pairings, I like softer, milder cheeses such as French Neufchatel or an American Teleme. Neufchatel (pronounced Nuhf-shah-tull) can often be found

blended with cream cheese or in a blend called Alouette. But, it is important to steer clear of the flavored blends of Neufchatel such as garlic and herb, or tomato basil which will overpower and diminish the flavor of S.B. *Think mild, slightly salty and mushroomy!*

A perfect cow's milk cheese for eating with a cold, crisp New Zealand S.B., Teleme is similar in texture to domestic Brie. It has a pronounced tangy flavor, and is about 50 percent milk fat, which is substantially higher than the cheeses previously suggested. Teleme becomes runnier and stronger in flavor as it ages so you may enjoy heating this one up and breaking out the spoons to get every gooey drop of this one.

Your summertime snacking will be easy and elegant when you include a delicious combination of Sauvignon Blanc and cheese!

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