

A Last Look at Some Summer Whites

Written by Terry Connor
Wednesday, 28 August 2013 06:22

I am told that summer only lasts 93 days. That is really not enough time to enjoy the many delightful white wines available to us here in the Lowcountry. However, if we pick up the pace, maybe we can enjoy a few extra treats, either as an aperitif or with a nice barbecue before the deadline.

During July I picked up two white wines that I thought looked interesting. One was from the Illahe Winery in Oregon, and the other was from the Loire. The wine from Illahe was a completely new experience. It was a 2011 Gruner Veltliner. The wine had flavors of honeydew and cantaloupe and on the palate was fresh ambrosia. I had never heard of a Gruner from Oregon. Well, never too old to learn a new trick or two, I did some further research. It appears that the Illahe Winery has been in business since 1983. They produce Pinot Noir, Gruner Veltliner, Riesling, and Viognier. At the present time only the Gruner is available here in the Lowcountry.

The philosophy of production at the Illahe Winery is SMALL LOTS. Let's take a closer look. In 1983 Lowell Ford bought an 80 acre pasture in Dallas, Oregon. At that time, Lowell was already an experienced winemaker. His son Brad also wanted to join in on the venture and was welcome. Brad was also passionate about the environment and sustainability practices. This was also welcome. Brad focused on historical Pinot Noir production methods. This included using horses to move grapes instead of tractors, and using wood rather than metal wherever possible. Changes in the packaging of the wine were incorporated. (One change that got my attention was the Aluminum Capsule that is found in the neck area of the bottle. The capsule is now gone and in its place a drop of wax is placed over the cork. The wax is a highly satisfactory seal, a very acceptable substitute for the capsule, and friendly to the environment. Other wineries from other parts of the country are also using this method to seal the cork area.)

I pointed out above that Lowell had purchased an 80 acre pasture. The pasture was converted to grape growing and thus 53 of the 80 acres were planted under vine. Some of the grapes were, and still are, sold to other wineries; probably because of their exceptional quality. The remaining grapes are used to develop wines in SMALL LOTS. It works and it works well. The annual production of wines is usually sold out. Are you traveling west? The winery encourages visitors to stop by.

The second wine that I found in my wine cooler was the Mucadet from Chateau de L'Oiseliniere. I really did not want to let this wine get away from me. However, I only had one in the house and

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we can get more from a local Lowcountry retailer. This wine is very fresh and possesses a slight spritz, typical of Muscadet from the Loire. The wine delivers floral and fruity aromas when young. It is very pleasant in the mouth and has a long finish. Terrific with shell fish!

The winery that this wine comes from is spectacular. It has been said that we could go back to 1337 and find that vinification was being carried out. In 1657 the first documentation was published stating that 100% Melon de Bourgogne grapes were being used to produce their Muscadet. It remains so today. The beauty and manicure of the winery is typical of the properties and castles in the Loire. If you are a traveler, the Loire is less than a day from Paris. Go there and enjoy!

The winery has changed hands only four times since 1657. The last time it changed hands the new owners kept the winery as viable as the previous owners. However, something new was added. The winery is now a designated Bird Sanctuary and National Park. The profile of the bird on the label reflects the new change.

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When I hear the term "summer whites," I immediately think of Chardonnay in one column and all of the alternatives available to steer one away from Chardonnay in another column. The list is endless and provides one with an opportunity to explore and experiment. It all depends on what we want from our white selection. Do we want butter and oak flavor, or do we want citrus, melon, peach, pear, or whatever? To get some answers to these questions find a store that has frequent tastings, i.e. weekly. New wines are coming on the market all the time. Make notes. Keep a journal and, most important, ask questions. You will have fun and you will find the white that satisfies your taste.