



Sauvignon Blanc Gets Serious

The once simple-seeming white is getting all dressed up, with price tags linked to pedigree.

BY SARA L. SCHNEIDER ON MAY 2, 2018

VIEW SLIDESHOW



California [Sauvignon Blanc](#) has long been a favorite for white-wine lovers avoiding fat, buttery [Chardonnays](#). Generally crisp (credit stainless-steel treatment for that), dry, and citrusy, Sauvignon Blanc has been the drink-with-salad-by-the-pool wine, the pop-open-when-you're-sailing wine—the almost always wallet-friendly wine.

If that's still your impression, take another look now. Many are going for more than \$50, with some of the best garnering up to \$400. Rumor has it that one of [Napa Valley's](#) top-tier producers has priced its Sauv Blanc at about \$1,200. Such winemakers don't do this without cause. There must be an explanation.

A good place to start is with the grapes' source vineyard. As Robin Lail of [Lail Vineyards](#) points out, the leaf-by-leaf farming of Napa Valley's most precious acreage is no less expensive because the grape is white rather than red. (Her Georgia Sauvignon Blanc, from the Totem Estate Vineyard in the middle of Yountville, is priced at \$150.)

Drill down from there, and you find price linked to winemaking choices in the cellar. More and more vintners are fermenting Sauvignon Blanc in oak and/or concrete eggs instead of stainless steel, for complex flavors and textures. And the more new French oak barrels (which are among the world's most expensive casks) used in aging, the higher the price. Often, during that time in oak, the lees are stirred regularly, resulting in even more complexity, mouth-filling weight, and labor costs. Sauvignon Blancs raised this way make you think as you sip them, as much as complex red wines make you think.

Of course, beyond these direct cost connections, the forces of reputation, scarcity, and pedigree are at work, as they are with all great bottles. Lail's wines, for instance, are made by the highly regarded Philippe Melka. Here are five that are worth all that, including a couple that come with this new winemaking style but not the investment-grade price tag.

👉 NAPA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC

Heart Block Sauvignon Blanc

BY SARA L. SCHNEIDER ON MAY 2, 2018

«PREV

2 OF 5

NEXT»

#2

Heart Block Sauvignon Blanc



Gamble Family Vineyards Heart Block Sauvignon Blanc Yountville, Napa Valley
Photo: Courtesy Gamble Family Vineyards

Gamble Family Vineyards Heart Block Sauvignon Blanc Yountville, Napa Valley (\$90)

Honeyed citrus and stone fruit are balanced by lime zest and a flinty minerality in this intense and layered wine. Precious little is made of this [Heart Block Sauvignon Blanc](#), and all from a small block in the center of vineyards owned by the Gamble family, longtime Napa growers.

👉 NAPA VALLEY SAUVIGNON BLANC