

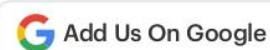
## This Is The Sauvignon Blanc For People Who Don't Like Sauvignon Blanc

Alto Adige, Trentino and Friuli have spent generations perfecting a style of sauvignon blanc that sits between Loire austerity and New World excess—and it's exactly what the skeptics have been missing.

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Not all sauvignon blanc is created equal. Northern Italy is proof.  
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For many wine drinkers, sauvignon blanc seems to exist in two extremes. On one side are the demonstrably sauvignon blanc-y sauvignon blancs, practically slapping you in the face with grapefruit, guava, and grass. The entry level blind tasting exam sauvignon blancs, if you will. Then there are the more restrained, mineral-driven

wines associated with France's Loire Valley. You know, the wines a certain big-time country-turned-pop singer singlehandedly blew up? Both versions can leave some wine drinkers feeling like sauvignon blanc isn't for them. It's either too loud or too austere for their palate.

But Northern Italy offers a third option. Across Alto Adige, Trentino and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, sauvignon blanc finds a delicious middle ground.

“Italian Sauvignon Blanc sites comfortably between the sharp, ‘icy’ wines of the Loire Valley and the richer, more expansive expressions of the New World,” says Allegra Angelo, partner at Vinya Wine Bar in Miami, via email. “It finds a compelling balance between fruit—whether it's fresh lemon, fuzzy peach or green mango—and the more seductive, non-fruit elements like cold stone, spring flowers and, in some cases, a touch of oak-driven spice.”

## **A Grape That Thrives in the North**

Although not native to Italy, sauvignon blanc has been cultivated for generations in Italy's cooler northern regions, where mountain elevations, big diurnal swings and varying soils allow producers to preserve acidity while developing ripe, expressive fruit.

“In Trentino, the mountains are essential,” says Anselmo Guerrieri Gonzaga, owner of Tenuta San Leonardo, via email. “The difference between warm days and cool nights helps preserve freshness, acidity and aromatic precision. If the climate is too warm, it can lose some of its elegance. In Trentino, the mountain influence gives the wine brightness, tension and a very clear identity.”

Altitude can also produce meaningfully different interpretations of the grape—higher sites can create wines that are more mineral and tense, while other locations yield softer and more fragrant expressions. The result isn't one “Italian” sauvignon blanc style. Instead, northern Italy offers a spectrum of wines united by freshness, balance, and a distinct... Italian-ness.

# Alto Adige, Trentino or Friuli?



In Trentino, the mountains aren't just scenery. They're the reason the wines taste the way they do.

CONSORZIO VINI DEL TRENINO

For consumers shopping for Italian sauvignon blanc, geography offers the easiest starting point.

Daniela DaSuta, founder of SommSpace in Austin, recommends looking for wines labeled Alto Adige, Collio, Collio Goriziano or Friuli Colli Orientali, all benchmark areas for the variety. Her personal favorites are from Alto Adige. “They are ripe, but nuanced—think less ‘herbaceous’ and more ‘herbal’—and they have an electric edge that complements the fruit. Some are almost salty, especially when grown on volcanic or limestone sites, which makes them a blast to pair with.”

Trentino shares some of that alpine character. Guerrieri Gonzaga describes his Vette Sauvignon Blanc as showing citrus, white flowers, fresh herbs and occasional notes of elderflower and sage, carried by “a pleasant mineral tension.” Having tasted the wine many times myself, I consider Vette a benchmark for Trentino sauvignon blanc.

Friuli-Venezia Giulia, meanwhile often turns up the volume. “If Alto Adige Sauvignon Blanc is energized, Friuli Sauvignon Blanc is super-charged,” Angelo says. The region—Collio in particular—can produce sauvignon blancs that are more of everything: more aromatic, more concentrated, more textural. These wines may

appeal to drinkers who enjoy those more pronounced aromatics, a subtle oak influence, or extended aging.

When choosing between them, Angelo suggests asking a few simple questions: “Do I want something lighter, or something bolder and more expressive? Am I drawn to subtle oak-driven notes—vanilla, toast, graham cracker spice—or do I prefer the wine without that extra layer? And texturally, do I want something wavy and curvy on the palate, or something sleeker and more direct?” For the latter, Alto Adige is the natural entry point, especially for drinkers who already gravitate toward wines like Chablis, grüner veltliner or albariño.

## **Sauvignon Blanc for People Who Don't Like Sauvignon Blanc**

Much like the ABC crowd who mistakenly assume all chardonnay is buttery, many drinkers who claim not to like sauvignon blanc deep down aren't rejecting the grape. They're rejecting a specific style. “Many people who say they don't like Sauvignon Blanc are reacting to one very specific style: often intensely tropical, pungent, or aggressively grassy examples,” says DaSuta.

It's not just consumers who are skeptical. “Because Sauvignon Blanc is prolific and popular, some wine professionals tend to dismiss it,” says Angelo. “The logic seems to be that if the general consumer loves something, it can't be serious. I disagree.” In the hands of a good producer, she argues, sauvignon blanc delivers great acidity, expressive fruit, and some non-fruit elements, and is “capable of delivering an absurd amount of pleasure for the price.”

Italian sauvignon blanc offers an alternative that is typically subtler, more textured and less dependent on those pungent aromatics. The wines can show herbs without tasting aggressively grassy, ripe fruit without becoming a fruit cocktail and minerality without being exhausting to drink. That restraint also challenges the idea that sauvignon blanc must be extremely aromatic to be recognizable.

“The perfume should be there, but the wine should remain elegant, fresh and gastronomic,” insists Guerrieri Gonzaga. “For me, a good Italian Sauvignon Blanc should make you want to take another sip.”

# A Natural at the Table



Northern Italian sauvignon blanc's superpower? it goes with almost everything.

ALTO ADIGE WINE/FLORIAN ANDERGASSEN

Northern Italian sauvignon blanc may be at its most persuasive at the dinner (or lunch) table. Its acidity and herbal character make it an intuitive partner for spring vegetables, asparagus, seafood, shellfish, fresh cheeses and dishes built around citrus or herbs. But its usefulness extends well beyond northern Italian cuisine.

Angelo recommends boquerones on toast, pan-fried fish with grilled lemon and herbs, crispy falafel and mildly spicy Pad See Ew. DaSuta points to Mediterranean chicken with tzatziki, Peruvian ceviche and sushi or sashimi. During a recent visit to Alto Adige, she found the region's locally grown asparagus especially delicious alongside the herbal qualities of sauvignon blanc.

These pairings work because the wines bring both freshness and flavor. The wines are also refreshingly uncomplicated. A good Italian sauvignon blanc does not require a special dinner or deep knowledge of the country's appellation system. It can be poured as an apéritif, opened with takeout or brought to the table alongside a simple piece of fish.

"It is a wine to open with friends, with fresh food, when you want something elegant but not heavy," says Guerrieri Gonzaga.

## Six Northern Italian Sauvignon Blancs To Try

**Tenuta San Leonardo Vette Sauvignon Blanc, Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT**

If there is one bottle that captures northern Italy's middle ground between Loire-like tension and New World generosity, it is this bottle. "Vette" refers to the peaks surrounding the vineyards, an apt name for a wine that is as crisp and energetic as Alpine air.

### **Attems Sauvignon Blanc, Venezia Giulia IGT,**

Attems offers a slightly riper, more generous introduction to Friulian sauvignon blanc, but never veers into tropical excess. This wine offers plenty of citrusy freshness and a savory edge that makes it perfect for weeknight sipping.

### **Borgo Conventi Sauvignon Blanc, Collio DOC,**

This classic Collio example leans into sauvignon blanc's leafy, herbal side, but still has enough juicy peach fruit and structure to keep it luscious rather than aggressively green.

### **Fantinel Tenuta Sant'Helena Judri Sauvignon, Collio DOC,**

Judri shows the more textured side of Collio sauvignon blanc. This is the bottle to reach for when you want something with enough body and complexity to carry through dinner.

### **Nals Margreid Stein Sauvignon, Alto Adige DOC,**

Fresh herbs, citrus and cool mountain energy make this a great choice for drinkers who love those minerally whites like grüner veltliner and albariño.

### **St. Michael-Eppan Sanct Valentin Sauvignon, Alto Adige DOC,**

This is a serious, beautifully polished expression of Alto Adige sauvignon blanc, worthy of a serious dinner event or a particularly discerning cellar.

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