

Enhancing your wine list

By now, you know how to build a basic wine list. But which countries should varietal wines come from? Wine guru **Neil Fortes** explains



Neil Fortes is an industrial psychologist and certified mediator by profession, but a wine guru at heart. He has a 25-year history in the wine business, consulting for many wine companies and marketing wines across Canada and the U.S. Please visit www.wineguru.ca for more information.

As a wine consultant, I've seen people buy wine from countries undeserving of a place on the wine list.

Some may buy wine from a country not recognized for that varietal because it costs less. Others simply lack an understanding of which countries are the best choice for particular varietals.

It is true that there are bargains to be had from lesser-known countries but often it is not worth experimenting. You may end up with a stale, unacceptable wine on your list that does not sell no matter how hard you try.

There are reasons some countries excel at certain wines types. For one, the climate must suit the grape type.

In cool climates (Northern Hemisphere countries such as Canada, Austria and France) wines are produced without the excesses of fruit due to the number of sun hours. In Southern Hemisphere countries such as Australia and Argentina, the sun shines for many hours and fruit is an abundant character of the wine.

In addition, the varietal may not display a character that the wine-buying public is fond of or used to.

Take, for example, Sauvignon Blanc which is available from Chile and Australia – these wines are not typical in character as it is too hot in those countries to produce those beautiful green, herbaceous Sauvignons that are acceptable to the North American palate.

Great Sauvignon Blancs tend to come from New Zealand or South Africa where the climate is cooler and the soil is volcanic, producing a mineral character with good, green acidity.

There are also typical wines that are only made in certain countries, and there are no other areas which offer these wines for sale on the world market – and if there are they may be poor examples.

Varietals such as Sangiovese from Italy, Zinfandel from California, Pinotage from South Africa, Carmenere from Chile and Tannat from Uruguay are good examples of 'usual' wines. There are bargains to be had in all countries depending on the type of

supplier and if the wine is mass produced or estate bottled.

You can buy blended wines at a reduced cost, but it is imperative that the label display what varietals are used in the wine. North American wine drinkers want to know what they are drinking and the percentages of the blend as well. For instance, Cabernet Sauvignon (80 per cent)/Merlot (20 per cent) or Sauvignon Blanc (75 per cent)/Chenin Blanc (25 per cent).

In any case, matching countries to varietals doesn't have to be complicated. For your reference, I've provided a list of some reds and whites and the countries best known for those varietals.

Happy hunting!

WHERE TO GET THEM

REDS

Cabernet Sauvignon	Australia, California, South Africa, Bulgaria
Cabernet Franc	Canada, New York state
Merlot	Any country
Malbec	Argentina
Pinot Noir	New Zealand, Northern California, Canada, Oregon
Shiraz	Australia, South Africa, Chile
Syrah	France
Sangiovese	Italy

WHITES

Chardonnay	Any country
Sauvignon Blanc	New Zealand, South Africa
Riesling	Germany, Canada, New York state, Oregon
Viognier	Australia, California
Semillon	Australia
Pinot Grigio	Italy