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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SIERRA CLUB

Red or White? Go With Green.

Please your palate (and the planet) with these sustainable wines

IT'S THE SEASON TO TOAST moms, dads, and grads—but who really needs an excuse to savor wine? In that spirit, we corralled five wine experts to blind-sample and score 20 whites and 20 reds from around the world, each with a legitimate claim to environmental responsibility.

How'd we pick 40 from the hundreds (maybe thousands) of wines claiming to be green? Since even pros have their limits, we confined our selection to the most popular kinds—omitting blends, bubbly, and esoteric tongue twisters like gewürztraminer. Then we researched which eco-minded brands oenophiles tend to respect. Then we weeded out the greenwashers.

Our 1-to-10 scoring system required the experts to rate a wine's ap-

pearance, aroma, taste, structure, body, and finish. We put extra stock in the overall score the tasters gave each wine (1 = "hate it"; 10 = "love it").

A professional-grade wine tasting isn't the cheese-and-giggles affair you might imagine. The panel assembled in *Sierra's* modest conference room, where they swirled, sniffed, sipped, and spit, jotting their judgments in mostly somber silence. Between tipplings, the judges launched into earnest, adjective-laden debate. No one imbibed (not one swallow, they assured us), and no car keys were collected.

The result: a distillation of heavyweight opinions about wines that do their part for the planet, proof that at least some of them deserve a place in the most distinguished wine cellar. —*Avital Binstock and Michael Fox*

HEADSHOTS: CHUCK BALDWIN (5) BELOW: LORI EARNES (6)

THE WINNERS **WHITES**

SAUVIGNON BLANC

1 CEÀGO VINEGARDEN

2007 | Redwood Valley, California
PRICE: \$16 | SCORE: 7.8

TASTING NOTES: The experts agreed that Ceàgo's light-straw-colored wine is a good example of a sauvignon blanc. Hernandez detected a "floral and citrus aroma," and Rapp noticed a "slight effervescence" and an "appropriately tart finish." Pairing recommendations included shellfish, especially ceviche, and roasted vegetables.

GREEN NOTES: Organic and biodynamic, Ceàgo shuns chemical fertilizers and pesticides, using only homeopathic sprays.

2 SARACINA

2007 | Mendocino, California
PRICE: About \$25 | SCORE: 7.3

3 HONIG

2007 | Napa Valley, California
PRICE: \$16 | SCORE: 5.2

PINOT GRIGIO

1 FETZER

2007 | Mendocino, California
PRICE: \$9 | SCORE: 7.25

TASTING NOTES: With a "very alluring" aroma of flowers and honeysuckle (Hernandez) and a taste reminiscent of apples, grapefruit, and, according to Rapp, banana flambé, Fetzer has a "nice mouthfeel" (Pucilowski) and a tasty finish. But not everyone was sold. Dutton said, "This uninteresting style is what we've come to expect from pinot grigio," and Wines opined that it's "not exciting," adding, "This is the pinot grigio for ladies who lunch." Drink it alone, they said, or pair it with grilled vegetables, salad, or fish.

GREEN NOTES: Fetzer is powered by renewable energies (solar, wind, and geothermal), and its other green moves include composting and reducing its landfill-bound materials by 95 percent since 1990.

2 GREENWOOD RIDGE

2007 | Anderson Valley, California
PRICE: \$18 | SCORE: 6.8

3 BRANCOTT

2007 | Blenheim, New Zealand
PRICE: About \$12 | SCORE: 5.6

CHARDONNAY

1 HANDLEY CELLARS ESTATE VINEYARD

2006 | Anderson Valley, California
PRICE: \$20 | SCORE: 6.9

TASTING NOTES: A yellow-gold wine with a muted apple aroma and an oaky fruit taste, Handley has a "perfect" texture and a "luscious" finish (Pucilowski). Hernandez noted its great flexibility and called it a "perfect dinner-party wine that will leave your guests wanting more." Pairing suggestions included eggplant and rich pastas.

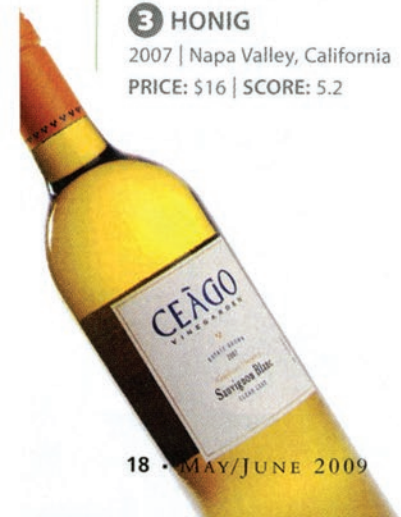
GREEN NOTES: Handley is 75 percent solar powered, avoids using chemicals whenever possible to prevent runoff, and makes its wines from organic grapes.

2 [TIE] FRENCH RABBIT

2007 | Pays d'Oc, France
PRICE: \$10 | SCORE: 5

2 [TIE] PAUL DOLAN

2007 | Mendocino, California
PRICE: \$18 | SCORE: 5



OUR EXPERT PANEL



ALYSSA RAPP, founder of *Bottlenotes.com*, an online wine community, and author of *Bottlenotes Guide to Wine: Around the World in 80 Sips*.



AL HERNANDEZ, editor of the *Vine Times* (*thevine.com*) and host of nationally syndicated food and wine radio programs.



TRACI DUTTON, sommelier at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone (*ciaprochef.com*).



EMILY WINES, master sommelier (one of only 15 U.S. women to hold the title) at Fifth Floor restaurant (*fifthfloorrestaurant.com*) and winner of the prestigious Remi Krug Cup.



G. M. "POOCH" PUCILOWSKI, chief judge of the California State Fair Commercial Wine Competition (*thebestcalifornia.wine.com*).

RIESLING

1 BANROCK STATION

2006 | Riverland, South Australia
PRICE: \$7 | SCORE: 8.8

TASTING NOTES: This was the true winner, scoring higher than any other. Wines described its aroma as a "laser beam of lime blossom" and wrote that it "smells Australian." Rapp was surprised at the lushness of the taste given the drink's ultralight color, and Dutton, who loved its purity, imagined it paired with schnitzel or Waldorf salad.

GREEN NOTES: The company has contributed more than \$5 million to wetland-conservation projects, installed water-conserving irrigation systems, and runs the solar-powered Wine and Wetland Centre.

2 GREENWOOD RIDGE

2007 | Anderson Valley, California
PRICE: About \$18 | SCORE: 7.6

3 FETZER

2007 | Mendocino, California
PRICE: \$9 | SCORE: 6



THE WINNERS REDS

PINOT NOIR

1 SOKOL BLOSSER

2006 | Dundee Hills, Oregon
PRICE: \$38 | SCORE: 7.1

TASTING NOTES: Pucilowski "didn't realize organic wineries could make such a fine example of pinot noir," and Rapp called it a "classic Oregonian pinot." This wine, all cherry, is garnet colored with vanilla-roasted oak and tobacco characteristics that, Dutton noticed, "make you hungry." For what? Try lacquered Chinese duck and spinach (Wines) or coq au vin (Hernandez).

GREEN NOTES: Sokol Blosser is organic, has been certified by Salmon-Safe (*salmonsafe.org*), and was the first winery to earn LEED certification.

2 STOLLER

2006 | Willamette Valley, Oregon
PRICE: About \$40 | SCORE: 6.8

3 DELOACH

2006 | Sonoma, California
PRICE: About \$45 | SCORE: 5.8



MERLOT

1 FAIRHILLS

2008 | Western Cape, South Africa
PRICE: \$10 | SCORE: 5.7

TASTING NOTES: A nicely balanced, dark-ruby merlot with a taste that recalls smoked green bell pepper, Fairhills has a "healthy yet silky" structure (Rapp), a "fair amount of tannins" (Pucilowski), and "arcs from earth to fruit" (Dutton). "I did not expect to enjoy this wine as much as I did," Rapp wrote, and Hernandez thought it "must be paired with food." Dutton recommended herb-roasted pork or semi-hard cheeses.

GREEN NOTES: Fairhills wines are made of handpicked, organic grapes from vines more than 10 years old.

2 [TIE] CEÄGO VINEGARDEN

2006 | Redwood Valley, California
PRICE: About \$22 | SCORE: 5.6

2 [TIE] TERRA BLANCA

2003 | Red Mountain, Washington
PRICE: About \$20 | SCORE: 5.6



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