

WINE ENTHUSIAST

BEST OF YEAR 2023



THE



TOP 100 WINES OF 2023



THE
No. 1 WINE
OF THE
YEAR



TOP 100
SPIRITS

FEATURING

TOP 50
BEERS

\$8.99 US & CANADA

\$8.99US/CAN

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2023 WINE STAR
WINNERS REVEALED



GRAPE:
Thick-skinned, slow-ripening, aromatic white variety

CROSSING OF:
Ugni Blanc and Rayon d'Or

**AROMAS/
FLAVORS:**
Floral perfume, honey, pear, golden apple, grape juice

WINE STYLES:
Still, sparkling and a range of sweetness levels—from off-dry to luscious

Vidal Blanc

Vintners find vivacity and versatility with what's become a classic hybrid grape.

Could this be the next grape variety to have its moment in the spotlight? Developed by French grape grower Jean Louis Vidal in the 1930s, Vidal Blanc was originally created to produce Cognac. But its ability to withstand frigid temperatures in the vineyard and produce a unique yet approachable flavor profile has qualified it as a white wine variety that can be loved by all kinds of wine drinkers.

A hybrid variety born from Ugni Blanc (also known as Italian white grape variety Trebbiano) and Rayon d'Or, Vidal Blanc is an aromatic grape with strong notes of fresh florals, honey, pear, golden apple and even Welch's white grape juice. But when it is consumed, wine drinkers might be surprised by Vidal Blanc's vibrant fruit flavor and racy acidity with just a touch of sweetness.

"Vidal is one of those grapes where you can't smell the sweetness, but the florality is the variety's most memorable characteristic," says Torrey Grant, adjunct professor of wine appreciation at Syracuse University, adding that New York's Finger Lakes region is an ideal region for Vidal because the variety must work for its ripeness. "You have an area that can be cold, wet, prone to frost and mildew—all conditions that Vidal Blanc was created to adapt to."

But the Finger Lakes isn't the only region having all the fun with Vidal Blanc. Michigan, Virginia, Ohio, Missouri and Minnesota are just a few states in the U.S. where Vidal Blanc is grown for sweet, dry and sparkling wine production.

In Canada, Vidal Blanc is treasured for the country's famous Icewines. Since the 1970s, Inniskillin has led the way in Icewine production, embracing its unique microclimate and complex soil composition generated by glaciers that once covered the region. "The Ontario wine country is located between 41° and 44° North,

a range that represents the heart of the world's fine wine zone for regions such as Chianti Classico in Tuscany and Burgundy," says Irene Graziotto, wine media strategist and certified Associazione Italiana Sommelier (AIS). "Back in the mid-1980s, producers were looking for a grape that could preserve freshness despite Ontario's hot summer, and Vidal has a high natural acidity and thick skin that could allow for the production of Icewines, without breaking during the ripening season." While Vidal Blanc can withstand temperatures as low as -28° C (-18°F), the grapes still must be harvested in a healthy condition in order to make the best Icewine.

In addition to its vibrancy and vitality, Vidal Blanc also has great value as an everyday table wine. In Maryland, Boyd Cru Wines created its Community Vidal Blanc to encourage consumers to explore beyond what they're used to. Jon'll Boyd, who co-owns Boyd Cru with her husband, Matthew, first encountered Vidal Blanc during an apprenticeship at Hosmer Winery in the Finger Lakes region. She recalls learning about a number of hybrid grape varieties at the time and being fascinated by their adaptability. "When Matthew and I were first considering winemaking, Vidal Blanc wasn't on our radar, but we were considering grapes we enjoyed and this was one of them," says Boyd. "We want to bring something different to the market that's joyful, vibrant and approachable."

The opportunity for Vidal Blanc to have its moment is possible, but it will be up to wine producers to communicate the beauty and diversity of the wines. "Vidal will have to find a foothold between being a fun wine and a wine that can appeal to those who appreciate [traditional] European white grape varieties," says Grant.

—Chasity Cooper

ANDRESSA WEISSNER