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12 Refreshing California Whites

Many of these juicy Golden State Sauvignon Blancs are priced at just \$20 or less

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California Sauvignon Blanc has a lot going for it. In the Golden State, it makes for a refreshing and aromatic varietal in a wide range of styles, it's value-priced, it succeeds in many different regions, and it has benefited from a recent string of good vintages.

Among the dozen California Sauvignon Blancs featured here are two newcomers. One of the new faces to us is Grieve Family Winery, whose 2008 Sauvignon Blanc hails from a vineyard in the little-known Lovall Valley in southwest Napa. Winemaker Michael Terrien (most recently of Hanzell Vineyards) blends 12 lots from this single site, from two different pickings, a month apart. The result is intense, tropical and extremely mouthwatering.

Ziata is another new brand, founded by Karen Cakebread along with winemaker Anne Vawter; the grapes come from a sloping hillside in eastern Napa Valley. This is a delicate and detailed wine, with mouthwatering acidity.

In the value camp, pay attention to the \$12 and under offerings from Line 39, Dry Creek, Firestone and Geyser Peak. These wines have a variety of flavors from grassy and herbal to ripe pear or pineapple; they also come from all over the state—Sonoma, Lake and Santa Barbara Counties. What they do have in common is juicy acidity and attractive price tags.

GRIEVE Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley 2008 Score: 90 | \$40

This has good intensity, with pineapple, guava and passion fruit flavors that are ripe and vibrant, with a mouthwatering juiciness and a finish that goes on and on. Drink now. 620 cases made. —*M.W.*

ZIATA Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley 2008 Score: 89 | \$23

A refreshing mix of Key lime, passion fruit and guava flavors are delicate and detailed, with a mouthwatering acidity, a light body and a mineral edge. There's a slightly coarse finish. Drink now through 2014. 252 cases made. —*M.W.*

ARKENSTONE Sauvignon Blanc Howell Mountain 2006 Score: 88 | \$40

Broad, showing ripe tropical pineapple, mango and citrus flavors, with hay, lanolin and dried apricot notes. Full-bodied and smooth, but with a refreshing kick of citrus. Drink now. 200 cases made. —*M.W.*

ROBERT BIALE Sauvignon Blanc Yountville Pollo Bianco 2008 Score: 88 | \$27

A delicate expression, with pretty pear, peach and apple flavors, a juicy acidity and a light body. Floral, almond and spice details fill in on the finish. Drink now. 400 cases made. —*M.W.*

CHATEAU ST. JEAN Fumé Blanc Russian River Valley La Petite Etoile Vineyard 2007 Score: 88 | \$20

A smoky, toasty, cedary presence dominates this wine, but the spice details, ripe peach and nectarine flavors, and refreshing finish balance the strong, campfire presence—as does the wine's focus and persistence. Drink now through 2014. 4,393 cases made. —*M.W.*

GAMBLE FAMILY Sauvignon Blanc Yountville Gamble Vineyard 2008 Score: 88 | \$28

There's great intensity to the ripe, fresh peach, lemon and green apple flavors that are delightfully tangy and juicy. The flavors persist on the long finish, with an herbal twang. Drink now. 2,250 cases made. —*M.W.*

CLOS PEGASE Sauvignon Blanc Napa Valley Carneros Mitsuko's Vineyard 2008 Score: 87 | \$21

Tangy and intense, with assertive grass, petrol, peach, nectarine and apricot flavors that are ripe and mouthwatering. Drink now. 1,918 cases made. —*M.W.*

LINE 39 Sauvignon Blanc Lake County 2008 Score: 87 | \$10

Elegant and full-bodied, with ripe Bartlett pear and apple flavors, hints of spice and citrus peel. The refreshing acidity kicks in on the finish. Drink now. 8,504 cases made. —*M.W.*

NAVARRO Sauvignon Blanc Mendocino Cuvée 128 2008 Score: 87 | \$18

Melon flavors and pear notes are ripe and nicely juicy, with yellow apple, fig and a slight honeyed note that lingers on the finish. Drink now. 1,800 cases made. —*M.W.*

DRY CREEK Fumé Blanc Sonoma County 2008 Score: 86 | \$12

Fresh, with a pleasantly herbal, peppery edge. Bright lemon-lime citrus flavors and crisp pineapple notes come together in a light-bodied, refreshingly juicy package. Drink now. 21,696 cases made. —*M.W.*

FIRESTONE Sauvignon Blanc Santa Ynez Valley 2008 Score: 86 | \$12

Vibrant and tangy, bursting with lemon-lime, green apple and melon flavors. Compact, direct and wonderfully juicy on a light body. Drink now. 16,475 cases made. —*M.W.*

GEYSER PEAK Sauvignon Blanc California 2008 Score: 86 | \$12

Bright and tangy, with a strong, pungent herb and grassy side. The combination of a lean body, crisp acidity and intense flavors creates a very refreshing wine. Drink now. 100,000 cases made. —*M.W.*