

Summer sippers: 10 Idaho wines to brighten your palate and your day

BY DANA OLAND

doland@idahostatesman.com June 20, 2014

June is Idaho Wine Month, and with the first day of summer on June 21, wine drinkers are ready to embrace a lighter, zippier beverage.

That means a summer sipper.

Find the right one, and it can brighten your palate and your day, says Bodovino wine director Trevor Hertrich.

"It's a wine that just tastes better when you're sitting out on the patio," he says. "It's refreshing; it's light and quenches your thirst, and you don't have to think about it too much - you just open, drink and enjoy."

Idaho's wine scene comes on strong in the summer, as local winemakers produce wines on par with their regional and global peers.

We asked Idaho wine experts to offer tips and suggestions - from local to global - for summer sipping.

KEEP IT COOL AND EASY

You want your summer sipper cold, but not too cold, Hertrich says.

Most wines taste best at 55 to 60 degrees - significantly warmer than our refrigerators.

"Take your bottle out about a half-hour before you're ready to drink it," Hertrich suggests. "By the time you get to the picnic, it should be at the right temp."

When you can, go for the screw cap, especially in the summer.

"No one wants to mess with an opener on the lawn at the Idaho Shakespeare Festival," Hertrich says. Plus, these wines are ready to drink and don't need a natural cork that allows them to age.

A ROSÉ IS NOT JUST A ROSÉ

Idaho winemaker Greg Koenig bottled his first Idaho dry Rosé in 2001.

"But I couldn't sell it to anyone, so I gave up for a while," he says.

Today, with the worldwide popularity of this drier pink wine, his Koenig Dry Rosé (\$15) is going strong. It's one of the favorites of Ryan Robinson, sommelier at Ruth's Chris Steak House in Boise. A blend of Merlot and Syrah, its complex profile can match up to a variety of foods, and yet it's crisp and floral enough to drink on its own.

Rosé is a great year-round food wine, but it's particularly handy in the summer because it pairs with everything, Hertrich says.

"You're going to a barbecue and someone brings a potato salad, and you've got brats, chicken, burgers and ribs - and a rosé works well across all of those flavors," he says.

Hertrich recommends Melanie Krause's Cinder Wines Dry Rosé (\$16), with its hints of strawberry and watermelon and a light minerality.

State & Lemp restaurant co-owner Remi McManus suggests Sawtooth Cinsault (pronounced sinsou) Rosé (\$15), with its crisp cherry and melon flavors and bright floral finish. He calls it "a nice, vibrant, beautiful wine that I think is the best Snake River AVA rosé out there."

Vintner, wine educator and consultant Kathryn House, of House of Wine, recommends Indian Creek Winery's Rosé of Mourvedre. It's well balanced, lively and crisp on the palate, with a bright strawberry finish, she says. (It's \$18 at the Indian Creek tasting room only.)

Zhoo Zhoo Wine Redhead (\$11) is a sassy and delicious rosé, Hertrich says.

RETHINK IDAHO RIESLING

Riesling is a prized grape in Idaho that helped build the Snake River AVA's foundation. But in the 1980s and 1990s, American-style Rieslings became highly sweet. Like White Zinfandel did for rosé, it gave the grape a bad rap in wine circles.

"Some of it's like hummingbird food," Robinson says.

While there still is a large market for the sweeter variety, there's a new school of Rieslings that are low in residual sugar and spicy, and they're bringing on a Riesling revolution. And some great ones are being made in Idaho.

Both Hertrich and Robinson recommend Idaho's Coiled Wines Dry Riesling (\$17), with hints of crisp apple and clove, followed by peach and pineapple and floral notes on the palate.

VA VA VIOGNIER

Viognier is a variety that's become popular worldwide in the past five years because of its seductive sweetness and floral aromas. It's also a grape that thrives in Idaho, and it's being embraced by local winemakers.

Hertrich recommends the Cinder Dry Viognier (\$18). It goes down smooth in hot weather, Hertrich says.

"It's a beautiful wine with tropical fruit, melon and a bright finish. It sits well on the palate," he said.

MORE LOCAL SUMMER SIPPERS

- Split Rail Winery's 2012 Terminal Post White Wine (\$16) is a blend of Chenin Blanc, Viognier and Muscat Blanc. "You get this bright racy acidity and nice core of melon from the Chenin, the Viognier adds an aromatic quality, and the Muscat layers some sweetness and floral notes," Hertrich says.

- HAT Ranch's Unoaked Chardonnay (\$22) is light, approachable and doesn't weigh you down like a more traditional, oaky Chard, Hertrich says.

- Huston Vineyards' Chicken Dinner White (\$16) is a super-focused, great summer food wine, Hertrich says.

GO GLOBAL

Robinson suggests trying Gruner Veltliner. A grape widely grown in Austria with a high acidity, it pairs extremely well with summer salads tossed in zippy vinaigrette and seafood. Gruner is one of the few wines that pairs with asparagus, a vegetable with a chemical composition that clashes with most wines.

The acidity makes some Gruners a bit bracing - and that's an acquired taste. He recommends starting with something approachable: 2011 Weingut Nikolaihof (\$22 at the Boise Co-op).

House suggests a crisp Spanish Albarino for summer sipping.

"It's my go-to wine when it's hot," she says. "If you want a wine that kills, try the Martin Codax (\$15.99). It has a little bit of residual sugar so there's a slight sweetness on top of the citrus, so you can just drink it."

Another wine to put on your radar is Portugal's vinho verde, says Hertrich.

It's not a grape variety, but a way of making wine. Its name translates to "green wine," meaning young. It's wine intended to be consumed in the year it's made.

"It's really the ultimate summer wine," Hertrich says. "Light, quenching, with a slight effervescence. It's lively on your palate and it's low in alcohol (between 8.5 and 11 percent), and you want to think about that in the summer heat. Plus, you'll be drinking a lot of it."

It comes in white, rosé and red that range from grassy and bone dry, such as Broadbent White Vinho Verde (\$8.49), to fruity with flavors of peaches, pears and other tree fruits, such as Aveleda Vinho (\$11.99).

DON'T COUNT REDS OUT

You can still drink red wines in the summer. A nice Merlot around a fire pit in the cool of the evening is just the ticket sometimes, but when it's hot, don't be afraid to cool it off, Hertrich says.

"Try a Beaujolais with a slight chill on, it is perfect for barbecue," he says.

Not Nouveau Beaujolais, but a nice cru from the Juliéenas appellation, such as Henry Fassy (\$16.99). These wines are highly drinkable, low in acid and contain tannins that have flavors of bright cherry and other red fruit.

"Pop it in the fridge for about 45 minutes, get it down to about 55 degrees, and you won't lose anything in the flavor. They're delicious with grilled meats and barbecue," Hertrich says.