

Tasting Highlights: 9 Distinct California Rhône Whites

New reviews of Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne and more from Sonoma, Paso Robles and beyond

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Tasting Highlights bring the best wines from our editors' most recent tastings to WineSpectator.com members.

California Rhône-inspired white wines can be considered a niche group in the sea of white wines from California. Even Viognier—which leads the category in recognition, acres and reputation—has only 3,000 acres planted, a blip when you consider that there are 98,000 acres of California Chardonnay.

But what an expressive, delicious category to explore! Wines made from Viognier, Roussanne, Marsanne and Grenache Blanc overall tend to be distinctly aromatic. Viognier is known for peach and floral notes, with plenty of spice. Marsanne has pear and nutty flavors and Roussanne can be honeyed, with apricot and herbal shadings. Grenache Blanc has been gaining momentum, with crisp acidity and mineral and lime notes.

Picpoul is one of the Rhône's lesser-known varieties. It's on the rise in California thanks to Tablas Creek, which imported the variety and began propagating it and making it available to growers. The wines can have a forward juiciness, which mingles well with pineapple, grapefruit and green tea flavors. Recently, California winemakers have pulled back from asserting a heavy oak influence, letting the grapes shine through.

Many of these wines are blends, yielding extraordinary complexity. We've also included the Vinum White Elephant, technically a Chenin Blanc-based blend, but which includes the Rhône varieties Viognier and Roussanne.



BONNY DOON VINEYARD
2015 Picpoul
Arroyo Seco | Beeswax Vineyard
Score: 88 | \$18

The lime and grapefruit flavors are crisp and vibrant, showing a hint of minerality on the finish. White flower and fresh herb notes linger. Drink now. 798 cases made.—M.W.