



Two of California Sauvignon Blanc's greatest supporters. From left: Kim Stare Wallace of Dry Creek Vineyard, and Michaela Rodeno of St-Supery

are fermented in stainless steel to retain herbal and citrus flavours, but Sonoma's Chateau St Jean, which has been making Fumé Blanc for 30 years, uses the name to indicate some barrel fermentation, says winemaker Margo von Staavern.

At Robert Mondavi Winery, the Napa Valley level Fumé Blanc is partially fermented in old oak and aged *sur lie*, and the reserve Fumé Blanc is fermented in new oak and aged *sur lie*. Neither wine undergoes malolactic fermentation.

'Some people think Fumé Blanc means oaky, but I think that is incorrect and inappropriate to our wine,' says Mark de Vere, resident Master of Wine at Robert Mondavi. 'Fumé Blanc is simply an alternative name for Sauvignon Blanc, and was created to bring to market a dry wine, when consumer expectations for Sauvignon Blanc were off-dry.'

Whatever the style, more and more Sauvignon Blanc producers are using screwcaps to preserve the bright fruit flavours of their wines. Another trend is the increasing production of high-end Sauvignon Blancs, by wineries such as Spottswoode, Lail Vineyards, Rudd and Robert Mondavi, with price tags of \$35–75 for elegant, food-friendly wines. Lail's Georgia, a Graves-like wine, is fermented and aged in new French oak for 18 months, while Spottswoode's Sauvignon Blanc is crisper.

And while back labels on California wines may describe in intricate detail the volcanic soils or winery pets, few describe the style or flavour profile of the wine. 'I've always been a fan of explaining the wine style on back labels,' says Rodeno. 'Unfortunately, I don't hear it discussed among my peers.' **D**

TAKE YOUR PICK...

'Classic' style (Loire model):

- 2006 Honig, Napa Valley \$16
- 2006 St Supery, Napa Valley \$20
- 2006 Shannon Ridge, Lake County \$16
- 2005 Barnwood The Border, Santa Barbara \$17
- 2005 Rusack, Santa Barbara \$17
- 2006 Galante, Monterey \$25
- 2005 Morgan, Monterey \$16
- 2005 Bernardus Griva Vineyard, Monterey \$20
- 2005 Wilson Fleming Estate, Trois Voyelles, Sonoma \$19
- 2006 Dutton Estate, Cohen Vineyard, Sonoma \$18
- 2004 Dry Creek Vineyard, Estate DCV3, Sonoma \$25

Pungent style (New Zealand model):

- 2006 Geyser Peak, Sonoma \$13

- 2006 Geyser Peak Block Collection, River Road Ranch, Sonoma \$21
- 2005 Mason Reserve, Napa Valley \$35
- 2005 Hanna, Slusser Road Vineyard, Sonoma \$17

Richer, oak-influenced style (Bordeaux model):

- 2003 Robert Mondavi Reserve, To Kalon Vineyard, Napa Valley \$35
- 2004 Chateau St Jean, La Petite Etoile, Sonoma \$20
- 2004 Lail Vineyards Georgia, Napa Valley \$75
- 2003 Source-Napa Heartblock \$50
- 2005 Source-Napa Gamble Vineyard \$28
- 2005 Spring Mountain Vineyard, Napa Valley \$32
- 2004 Buttonwood, Devin, Santa Barbara \$18

ONE TO WATCH



TANGENT WINES

Only in America can a Burgundian with a background in Champagne production make Spanish-style Albariño and Austrian-rooted Grüner Veltliner from California grapes.

Any grape type can grow anywhere in lawless California. Though it might have jarred his French sensibilities when Dijon-born Christian Roguenant moved to California's Central Coast in 1986 to make sparkling wine at Maison Deutz, he's now at ease in a realm of no rules, working at Tangent Wines, a one-year-old offshoot of Baileyana Winery in the Edna Valley.

For Baileyana, Roguenant produces traditional Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah. For Tangent he goes eclectic, making electrifying Albariño, Pinots Blanc and Gris, Sauvignon Blanc and a blend called Ecclestone, in a style that's more European than New World, more racy than rich. All the wines are white; none sees the inside of a barrel, nor any malolactic; alcohols are around 13.5%, and all are screwcapped.

The Niven family, owner of Paragon Vineyard in Edna Valley, also owns Tangent and Baileyana. Third-generationers John Niven and Michael Blaney say exotic varieties such as Albariño and Grüner Veltliner aren't one-off attention-seekers.

Says Roguenant: 'We're pulling older vines for the new, sexy stuff. Tangent is a wine style we'll stick to in years to come; it's just now gaining speed.'

Tangent, Albariño, Edna Valley, California 2006 ★★★★★

Effusive aromas of tangerine and white flowers lead to a crisp palate of white peach, lime and grapefruit. Taut and mineral, it has laser-like acidity and a persistent, tangy finish. \$17; US markets

By Linda Murphy