

White zin fans tickled pink

As a product advisor, it is my job to offer advice and assistance to customers shopping for wine, spirits, beer or any of the other products we offer.

I enjoy the discussions and every day brings new and different exchanges of information. In the area of wine, however, when white zinfandel comes up in a conversation, it more often than not will illicit one of three responses: "I absolutely love it!," "That is a ladies wine isn't it?" or "That isn't really wine."

I think that all of these opinions are great, and as wine is really a personal choice, each comment is valid. Those who enjoy it are passionate about it and not afraid to say so. White zinfandel is pink in colour so one may think it implies femininity and softness. Given the nickname "pink wine," many people seem to think that white zin isn't a wine they feel comfortable drinking. However, white zinfandel is a true wine and has a place in the world of wine just as surely as a cabernet or a shiraz.

White zinfandel is not a grape variety of its own. It is derived from the zinfandel grape which is a red wine grape. The colour of the wine is obtained by a process called "maceration." This term refers to the time the juice spends in contact with the skin and seeds of the grapes. The longer the maceration, the more intense the colour, aroma and tannins become. For white zin, the maceration time is far shorter than that of the red zinfandel, hence the difference in colour and concentration.

The fact that white zinfandel even exists is pure happenstance. The pink wine we enjoy today may not even exist if not for a "stuck fermentation" that occurred in the Sutter Home Winery in the Napa Valley in 1975 while attempting to produce red zinfandel. When fermentation becomes "stuck," the yeast is unable to convert all of the natural sugars in the grape juice into alcohol, so this means that the wine that is left remains sweet.

Sutter Home decided to sell this wine anyway and it turned out to be very well-received. The product found its niche on the palates of consumers who were "tickled pink" to discover a wine that was so easy to drink. It serves as a wine that offers a starting point for the transition from white to red wine.

Most versions of white zinfandels are on the sweeter and fruity side, some more than others, and are lower in alcohol than their red counterparts. White zins should be consumed while they are young and are best served slightly chilled, making them an excellent choice for a summer wine.

Most of the white zins are produced in California at a number of different wineries.

Even though these wines are fun and refreshing in the summertime, they are a great match with many foods and can be enjoyed in any season. White zinfandel pairs well with Asian food, ham and chicken on the barbecue. Fresh fruit that is in season served with white zinfandel is always a mouthwatering experience.

Here are a few I recommend:

* Sutter Home White Zinfandel 750 ml \$11.29: This wine offers aromas of watermelon and strawberries on the nose. On the palate there is an abundance of berry fruits ending with a refreshing crisp finish. This wine works well as an aperitif or served with Asian cuisine.

* Beringer White Zinfandel 750 ml \$11.99: This Zin has strawberries, citrus and melon on the palate with undertones of nutmeg and cloves. The spiciness is perfect for Thai cuisine and is wonderful with ham.

* Barefoot White Zinfandel 750 ml \$11.99: This is a crisp, fresh and lively wine with aromas of pineapple and citrus. Loads of sweet strawberry and pear on the palate. For a naturally sweet treat, serve this wine with a fresh fruit salad!

Written by Liz Durant, a product advisor at NB Liquor's Parkway Mall store in Saint John.