

PREMIUM

Wines of the Year 2020: white wines

An eclectic line-up led to an exciting tasting for our Wines of the Year expert panel, and the results offer plenty of reasons to venture into lesser-known white wine territory.



Tina Gellie
December 28, 2020



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‘A tasting of wines chosen by wine experts could end up a little geeky, with people choosing niche wines that only their trade peers would like,’ said Willard.

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‘But what I really enjoyed about all these wines is that, with a couple of exceptions, all have fairly broad appeal.’

Their assessment will, they hope, encourage people to venture outside of their comfort zones and try new wines, styles, grapes and regions. Especially when the unfamiliarity might not necessarily be reflected in flavour profile and that a given, unknown, label might surprise you with unexpected elegance and poise.

Willard and Andy Howard MW singled out the skin-contact Malvasia from Colares in Portugal, which Howard described as ‘a real eye-opener’. They also praised the Sartarelli Verdicchio. ‘It was a very individualistic, late-harvest but dry style, which is not what you normally expect from that grape variety.’

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Ronan Sayburn MS highlighted the ‘intriguing and complex’ white blend from Friuli, the ‘fantastic’ Vidiano-Assyrtiko blend from Greece and the ‘amazing’ Trousseau Gris from California.

‘There are so many less-familiar grapes out there that people might not have tried – or think they don’t like,’ he said. ‘Give them a go!’

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However, it was a very classic style that took the crown for top white – the Flametree Chardonnay from Margaret River in Western Australia.

‘It was my wine of the day,’ asserted Sayburn, who compared it to Meursault’s most-lauded producer, Domaine Coche-Dury.

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‘It was a benchmark example of top-quality Chardonnay, with that very reductive, struck-match character on the nose, beautifully elegant fruit purity on the palate and a very saline, limestone minerality.’

Howard admitted he had been hoping for a ‘benchmark Sancerre or Bordeaux Blanc’, but came away fascinated by the array of memorable wines from ‘less obvious’ corners of the globe. ‘It did make me think that while there are some great wines in classic regions, there are also some really intriguing wines from places more off the beaten track.’

Speaking for all three judges, he said not knowing the prices (and the categories in which wines were entered) was complicated in many ways – particularly with such an eclectic range of styles – but there was a silver lining. ‘It means you judge solely on taste, quality and the “do I want another glass of this?” factor.’

And shouldn’t that be the ultimate criteria?!

This article is based on copy that originally appeared in Decanter magazine by Tina Gellie. Edited for Decanter.com by Ines Salpico. Tasting notes from Beth Willard, Andy Howard MW and Ronan Sayburn MS.

Decanter's White Wines of the Year 2020



Flametree, Chardonnay, Margaret River, 2019

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Caramel and mocha notes on nose. Creamy with elegant balance between oak, fruit and acidity. Very typical Margaret River fruit with lovely lifted lemon, slightly honeyed spicy notes on palate. RS: Great nose of smoky struck match reductiveness, Coche like complexity and...

Points 96



Diamantakis, Diamantopetra Vidiano-Assyrtiko, Crete, 2019

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Rich, powerful, distinctive Greek blend with lovely ripeness of stoned fruits, saline minerality and an underlying smokiness. Very good use of oak here, subtle but adds to the complexity on the palate. Long, distinctive and smoke on the finish.

Points 95

Jolie-Laide, Fanucchi Wood Road Vineyard Trousseau Gris

Ripe fraises de bois and juicy raspberry fruit on the nose. Great purity on the palate with an

appealing freshness and vitality. Balanced acidity which leads to a long refreshing finish.



Points 95

Ramilo, Malvasia, Colares, Portugal, 2017

A highly distinctive white wine which has distinctive, exciting aromas on the nose of caramelised sugar, floral notes and some intriguing umami character. Velvety texture, fresh acidity, great balance of acidity and fruit with peach and apricot flavours as well as candied...



Points 95

Sartarelli, Balciana, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi, Classico Superiore, Italy, 2017

The nose has lovely purity with honeyed notes, allied to apricot conserve and roasted banana. Late harvest style but there is lovely freshness here to keep all the weight and ripeness in check. Acidity and a salinity underneath on the palate, with lovely texture and mouthfeel. Finishes fruity but fresh...



Points 95

Vie di Romans, Flors di Uis, Friuli Isonzo, 2018

Intriguing blend of floral, perfumed Malvasia and Friulano with steely Riesling results in an aromatic nose with grapey aromas coupled with lime and salty sea air. Bright, fresh, stoned fruit characters with some plumpness and ripeness balanced by lively acidity and grip. Layer...



Points 95

Bodega Alandes, Paradoux Blanc de Blancs, Uco Valley, La

Interesting, complex, evolving white wine with a fine balance between lemon acidity and some intriguing tree-fruit character on the palate. Fresh acidity, very elegant and balanced with gentle use of oak adds complexity.

Points 94



Clos du Gravillas, A Fleur de Peau, Vin de France, 2019

Rich on the nose with jasmine and lemons, just like early spring, with clear varietal definition. Beautiful balance and texture with obvious tannic grip from skin contact. Fresh acidity, orange and crunchy green apple. Zesty orange and a touch of cinnamon spice on finish.

Points

94



Notary Public, Jurassic Park Vineyard Chenin Blanc, Santa

Attractive perfumed and floral notes on nose, with typical fresh lemon aromas. Subtle toasty notes combine with ripe fruit to produce a moreish, attractive Chenin with great typicity for white wines from the region. Fresh and lively on the finish.



Points 94

Olifantsberg, Breedekloof Grenache Blanc, Western Cape, 2018

Fresh, lifted nose with an attractive saline character and lemony sherbet notes. Bright acidity, great texture with a flinty, steely backbone and subtle oak adding an extra layer of complexity. Pristine acidity leads onto the fruity finish.



Points 94

T-Oinos, Clos Stegasta Assyrtiko, Cyclades, 2018

Fresh saline and mineral nose with smoky pine typical of the variety. Rounded palate with liquorice hints and oyster shell salinity. Lovely herbal character comes through with bright citrus fruit on the refreshing finish.

Points 94



Leeu Passant, Radicales Libres, Klein Karoo, 2014

A highly individual wine with a Fino Sherry edge to the nose. Smoky toast and butter with oak maturation evident but balanced and not overly dominant. Rich, full and fleshy on the palate with rich pineapple and mango fruit. White pepper on the finish with lots of ripe yellow fruit.

Points

93



Dog Point, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand, 2019

Herbaceous on the nose with bell pepper and pea shoots along with lime, guava and passion fruit. Some spice and exotic fruits on the palate and a smokey character that adds roundness. Elegant and balanced with a long finish.

Points

93



El Porvenir de Cafayate, Laborum De Parcela Torrontés

Fine aromatic, tangerine and orange citrus aromas plus floral grapey notes. Attractive herbaceous character on palate with very balanced and refreshing, grippy acidity and a long, tropical finish.

Points 93



Gut Hermannsberg, Vom Vulkan Riesling trocken, Nahe, 2018

Lime scented and smokey flint on the nose. Lean and racy with a pristine crispness resulting from the vibrant acidity. Refreshing and cleansing on the finish.

Points 93



Domaine Jean-Baptiste Ponsot, Molesme, Rully 1er Cru, Burgundy, France 2017

Classic nose with some wood spice and ripe stone fruit. Cinnamon spice, smoky vanilla oak with pineapple, peach and some intriguing zesty, baked apricot flavours.

Points 93



Luis Seabra, Xisto Cru Branco, Douro, Douro Valley, 2017

Macadamia, hay, and yellow fruit aromas. Weighty but fresh, rich but elegant with wood influence adding to the complexity and concentration. Fresh, sappy and with a touch of savoury on the finish.

Points 93



Ornellaia, Poggio alle Gazze dell'Ornellaia, Toscana, 2018

Ripe nose of peach and apricot with tropical pineapple and some orchard yellow apple and quince. Rich and multi-layered with very good ripeness on the palate allied to fresh acidity and some intriguing herbal characters.

Points 93



Tony Bish, Zen, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand, 2018

Deep and smoky with bacon fat, ripe pineapple, mango and banana. On the palate, a fine balance between ripe, stoned-fruit Chardonnay character and lively acidity. Well balanced with some intriguing aged characters. Fresh on the long finish.

Points 93



Xavier Gérard, Côte Chatillon, Condrieu, Rhône, France, 2018

Creamy ripe apricot and peach yogurt with toasted nuts and granola. Plenty of weight here, soft and luxurious texture on the palate. There is also an appealing savoury, slightly mineral, edge which keeps the alcohol and oak in check. Spice on the finish.

Points 93



Edetària, Selecció, Terra Alta, Catalonia, Spain, 2016

Saline and stoney, fresh and ripe. Ripe, fleshy, warm peachy fruit on the palate with fresh acidity to balance. Good freshness but also warmth and generosity of fruit.

Points 92



Naudé, Chenin Blanc, Swartland, South Africa, 2018

Touch of smoke, with apple fruit. Great acidity to balance the intensity of ripe tree-fruit on the palate which is very concentrated and precise. Has a delicious mineral edge. Long and elegant example of South African Chenin.

Points

92



Uva Mira Mountain Vineyards, Chardonnay, Stellenbosch, South Africa 2017

A ripe and creamy Chardonnay, typical of region, but with a bright, fresh salty character on nose. The palate is mineral, almost slaty without losing any of the ripe, apple fruit.

Points

92



Blackbook, Controversy Pinot Meunier, Sussex, England, 2019

Fresh, youthful and vibrant with delicate red currant aromas. Palate offers sweet, red berries, sour cherries and balanced acidity.

Points

91



Miguel Torres, Viña Sol, Catalonia, Spain, 2019

Bright, fresh, and highly appealing with lovely ripeness of fruit and a light floral aroma. Palate shows crisp acidity and Mediterranean style with further intrigue from the floral notes.

Points

91



Casal Figueira, António, Lisboa, Portugal, 2017

Six rocky, limestone 50 to 100-year-old Vital parcels at 250–400m on the Serra Montejunto produce a cool, lemony palate, saturated with crushed coriander and fennel seed, celery salt, flint and chalky oyster shell. Intensely lingering, thirst-slaking and profound, with great goût ...

Points

95



J Bouchon, País Salvaje Blanco, Maule Valley, Chile, 2019

An interesting potpourri on the nose of wildflowers, a touch of sage, blossom and honey. Pristine flavours on the palate with fresh acidity.

Points

90



Jim Barry, Lodge Hill Riesling, Clare Valley, 2020

A very floral, lime and mint scented Riesling. Very dry on the palate with plenty of acidity and elegant lime fruit notes. Long and elegant with acidity leading on the finish.

Points

90



Kleine Zalze, Bush Vines Chenin Blanc Cellar Selection, 2019

Ultra-precise Chenin Blanc with great purity of fruit here. Some appealing hints of apple fruit, touch of peach and plenty of drive.

Points

90



Naudé, Langpad Old Vines Colombar, Western Cape, 2020

Good purity and a very appealing, early drinking example of Colombar from the Western Cape. Clean and fresh lemon citrus and green cucumber skin with fresh mint flavours. Strident acidity and a long finish.

Points

90



Quinta do Vallado, Prima, Douro, Douro Valley, 2019

Grapey and ripe sweet nose, floral, orange skin and tangerines. Ripe and rounded with fresh acidity and good length.

Points

90



Fazi Battaglia, San Sisto, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi

Delicate nose with fresh citrus and an attractive green asparagus and green pea character.

Points 89



Dr Konstantin Frank, Rkatsiteli Amber, Finger Lakes, 2018

Interesting wine with herbal aromas, ripe tropical fruit and some floral notes. Fleshy with plenty of acidity on the palate.

Points 88



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