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April Flowers

Weighty, yet refreshingly floral, Central Coast dry grenache blanc is a perfect pour for the season.

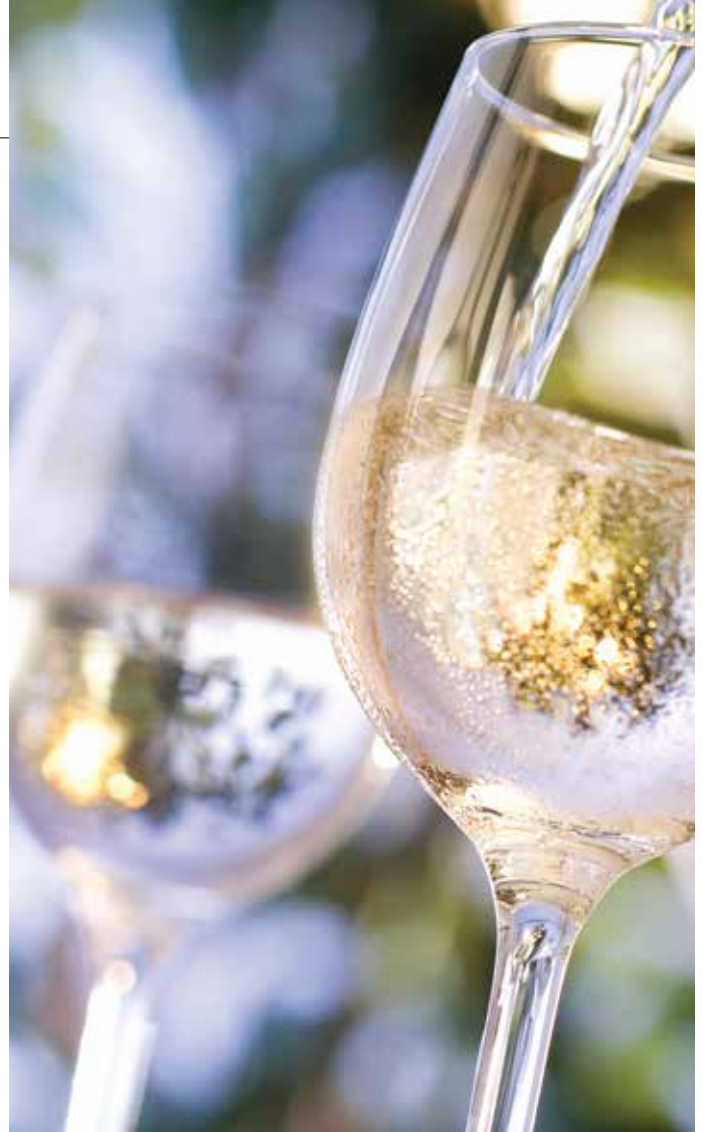
Central Coast grenache blanc is delicious, affordable, big but approachable, and food friendly. As a single-varietal wine, it's also, essentially, a Central Coast invention, our region's crisp gift to the wine world.

A Spanish grape that flourished in France's Rhône region, grenache blanc has for centuries been used almost exclusively as a blending grape.

But when vintners at Tablas Creek Vineyard became among the first to bottle it solo in 2002, they found that the Central Coast terroir, unlike the Rhône, allows the fruit and floral notes to blossom big while still holding its iconic acidity. A growing legion of local winemakers has followed suit, helping solidify grenache blanc's standing as a world-class style.

Fans of un-oaked chardonnay, especially chablis, will swoon over its racing acidity, white flower, and pear notes. Red-leaning fans will love the weight and bite of the stuff as well as its ability to pair with almost any food, including such disparate choices as oysters and spicy Oaxaca-cheese enchilada verde.

Grenache blanc stands as a living example of the Central Coast's continued loosening of the Old World yoke: The idea that the European tradition and styles of wine are ideal and absolute



and what every winemaker should be striving for, no matter the terroir, is simply a thing of the past.

In this case, the French gave us the Rhône white blend, and the Central Coast played around with it and discovered something groundbreaking and flat-out delicious. Here are five bone-dry grenache blancs to try.



Cypher Winery 2014 GRENACHE BLANC Camp 4 Vineyard, Santa Barbara County, \$24, cypherwinery.com

For years now, fellow winemakers and critics alike have lauded Cypher's 100-percent grenache blanc. Pulled from the Camp 4 Vineyard in the Santa Ynez Valley, this crisp un-oaked gem bursts with acidity and boasts both aromas and flavors of grapefruit, almost-ripe nectarine, Asian pear, fennel, and hints of honeysuckle and wet stone, along with a whisper of salinity. It remains the reigning standard bearer of Central Coast grenache blanc.



Ledge Vineyards 2016 GRENACHE BLANC G2 Vineyard, Willow Creek, Paso Robles, \$25, ledgevineyards.com

A protégé of Saxum Vineyards' Justin Smith, Ledge winemaker Mark Adams practices measured restraint, and his calculated hands-off approach allows Paso Robles' bold character to shine through, giving all of his wines a healthy dose of density, pleasing earthiness, and playful complexity. Plucked from the G2 Vineyard, this whole cluster-pressed, wild yeast-fermented grenache blanc has a stinging acidity that jibes well with the flavors of jasmine flower, Asian pear, lime, and earthy notes of green tea and golden raisins. >

Ranchero Cellars 2015 CHROME
La Vista and Self Family vineyards,
Paso Robles, \$28, rancherocellars.com

Amy Butler, the brains and muscle behind Ranchero Cellars, is a recognized star in Paso Robles. This latest release of her proprietary Chrome is the best yet. The acidity is racy, and thanks to aging in concrete and neutral oak and blending with 12 percent of clarette blanche, the body is surprisingly creamy for such a clean and translucent wine. The aroma is a seductive bouquet of white flowers and apricot, and the flavors are a lean swirl of nectarine, unripe pear, lemon meringue pie, green apple Jolly Rancher, rose water, mineral, and sea mist.



Tablas Creek Vineyard 2015
GRENACHE BLANC Tablas Creek
Vineyard, Adelaida District,
Paso Robles, \$30, tablascreek.com

There would be no grenache blanc wine in America if not for these California Rhône pioneers. Tablas Creek first brought over the grape in 1989 from Château de Beaucastel in France, then lobbied to make it an official American wine variety. The 2015 has a gorgeous aroma of lemon, apricot, and white flowers, reminiscent of a well-made chablis. The acidity slices strong from the start to the lengthy finish, providing a counterbalancing crispness to the creamy mouthfeel, as notes of apricot, lemongrass, lime zest, and sea salt dance across the palate.



Saint K 2016 GRENACHE BLANC
Luna Matta Vineyard, Adelaida District,
Paso Robles, \$28, saintkwines.com

On staff at both Desparada Wines and Herman Story Wines, Chris Kiranbay only has a few vintages of Saint K under his belt, but already he has discovered and honed his style, making fun, approachable, and often pleasantly funky wines. This Adelaida District whole cluster–pressed grenache blanc tips its toe slightly over the oxidation line, something that many traditional winemakers try to avoid. But it works well here with the round viscosity and bright aromas and flavors of fresh-cut grapefruit, peach, brioche, and a hint of dill and fruit cocktail syrup. ♦



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