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Musqué a fresh take on sauvignon blanc

by Fred Tasker - June 02, 2005

Are you a fan of sauvignon blanc? Then you'll love a newly popular strain of it called musqué. It has the fresh-cut-grass flavors of sauvignon blanc, but also more floral aromas, fuller body and extra flavors from guava to gooseberry.

It's crisp enough to cut through deep-fried calamari, viscous enough for spicy blackened red snapper.

Musqué's newest purveyor is Sonoma County's Dry Creek Vineyard, where a new generation has the courage to try new things and the wisdom to narrow the winery's focus onto its best vineyards.

When Dave Stare founded Dry Creek in 1972, he was a pioneer in bringing sauvignon blanc to Dry Creek Valley, until then planted more to gamay and gewurztraminer. And prunes.

"Everybody told him, 'You can't grow that there. It's too hot,'" says his daughter, Kim Stare Wallace. "But he did. And now Dry Creek Valley is synonymous with sauvignon blanc."

Today, Kim Stare Wallace and her husband, Don Wallace, live in a bucolic house in the middle of Dry Creek's vineyards, and run the place, with husband as general manager, wife as vice president and father retired.

"Sauvignon blanc has been our flagship wine for years," she says. "Now we're expanding it. My father loves France's Loire Valley. We're still making sauvignon blanc in the grassy, more varietal style of the Loire, with no oak barrel aging."

And they still call their sauvignon blanc "fumé blanc" on the label, in honor of the famous pouilly fumé wines of the Loire. Following another growing California trend, they have dropped their

old "reserve" fumé blanc to concentrate instead on single-vineyard wines - the new hallmark of individuality and excellence.

"The word 'reserve' doesn't mean much in California wines any more," she says.

Today they make three sauvignon blancs. The \$13 Fumé Blanc has a Sonoma Valley appellation, meaning its grapes come from all around the county. The \$25 Estate Fumé Blanc



DCV3 (Dry Creek Valley Vineyard 3) comes from a single vineyard. The Taylor's Vineyard Sauvignon Musqué comes from another single vineyard named for their daughter.

They've cut back chardonnay production from 25,000 cases a year to 11,000 giving up the grapes around Sonoma County they used to use, concentrating now on grapes from the closer Russian River Valley, which give more exotic, tropical flavors.

"You can only do something like that when you're a family-owned vineyard," she says. "Shareholders would never sign off on it."

Highly recommended:

2003 Dry Creek Estate Fumé Blanc

DCV3, Dry Creek Valley: "nutty aromas, rich orange and sweet, crisp, full-bodied." \$25

2003 Dry Creek Taylor's Vineyard

Sauvignon Musqué, Dry Creek Valley: "pear, kiwi and flavors, complex, viscous, smooth." \$25

2002 Dry Creek Cabernet Sauvignon,

Dry Creek Valley: "anise and bitter chocolate aromas rich, ripe tannins, opulent." \$21

Recommended:

2003 Dry Creek Fumé Blanc, Sonoma

County: "aromas of cut grass and pears, tart with grape." \$25

2003 Dry Creek Chardonnay,

Russian River Valley: "spicy cinnamon and pineapple aromas and flavors, creamy and smooth." \$16

2002 Dry Creek Heritage Zinfandel,

Sonoma County: "raspberries and bitter chocolate, rich and smooth." \$15

2002 Old Vines Zinfandel, Sonoma

County: "boysenberry and sweet milk chocolate flavors, generous." \$21

2002 Dry Creek Somers Ranch

Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley: "blackberry and licorice aromas espresso finish." \$30

2001 Dry Creek Meritage, Dry Creek

Valley (50 percent cabernet sauvignon, 36 percent merlot, 10 percent cabernet franc, 4 percent petit verdot): "blackberries and mint, soft, rich, mellow." \$28

Dry Creek
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