

FOOD & WINE

Viognier – A Guide to the Basics

From Its Greatest Expressions in the Northern Rhône to far-flung locations in California, Virginia, and Australia, Viognier is more widespread than you might think.

By the 1960s, aside from a handful of acres in the Northern Rhône, Viognier was teetering on the edge of vanishing. While it's certainly not nearly as widely planted as the most popular white grapes like [Chardonnay](#) and [Sauvignon Blanc](#), it nonetheless has more than bounced back, finding homes in California, Virginia, Australia, and beyond. In its ancestral French home, Viognier has expanded its acreage in the Rhône Valley and even gained a foothold in points further west throughout Southern France.

What is Viognier Wine?

Viognier is a white wine produced from the grape variety of the same name. In the Northern Rhône, the grape won't typically appear on the label — instead, the name of one of two appellations will be emblazoned: Condrieu, or Château-Grillet, the latter of which is comprised of a single producer of the same name. Viognier can be blended with the red grape [Syrah](#) in Côte-Rôtie. There, it is legally allowed to comprise up to 20% of any blend (though in reality it rarely reaches that high a percentage, because Syrah shows so brilliantly there).

Where Does Viognier Wine Come From?

Viognier has historically been most famously grown and produced in the Northern Rhône, where the appellations of Condrieu and Château-Grillet (which is also the name of the appellations only producer) are its epicenters. Viognier also does well throughout other parts of Southern France.

Outside of France, Viognier thrives in the United States, most notably in Paso Robles and other parts of California, where a group of passionate producers called the [Rhône Rangers](#) ([Bonny Doon](#), Kale, and many others) have helped it to shine. In Virginia, it has become one of the state's vinous calling cards along with Cabernet Franc. Don't discount Napa Valley Viognier, either: [Darioush](#) produced a stunning one in 2020, effusive with aromas of white peach and yellow plum that precede a palate that shimmers with flavors of honey-coated almond, mashed guava, fennel bulb, and the suggestion of lychee.

Viognier also thrives in Australia, particularly the Adelaide Hills and Barossa Valley. According to the trade group [Australian Wine](#), it was only first planted in the country in the 1970s, but in that relatively short period of time, it's become a respected part of the Australian wine firmament. You can also find it on the North Fork of Long Island; [RGNY](#) produced a terrific 2021 that shows the more crisp side of the variety, with lots of lemon-lime energy to the springtime flowers and nuts.

Why Should You Drink Viognier Wine?

Viognier is a deliciously aromatic grape variety that has the unique ability to smell like it should be sweet while still possessing the ability to be vinified into a delicious dry wine. As a result, it appeals to a wide range of wine drinkers, and often finds its way into the glasses of people who prefer more generous wines as well as those who shy away from overly creamy and thickly-textured whites.

Because Viognier can be produced in styles that range from lively to more creamy, producers can really craft it in a way that best expresses both the land in which it's grown, as well as their particular vision. It also takes well to oak, meaning that more viscous, creamy Viogniers often appeal to fans of rich Chardonnay, yet with a totally different aroma and flavor profile.

As such, Viognier is also very useful at the table: It can stand up to richer sauces without overwhelming lighter fish and poultry. It can be otherworldly with scallops, and it works with aromatically complex ingredients like ginger and lemongrass, as well. It also often has the ability to work with dishes that boast a bit of smokiness or spiciness — not too much, however, as foods that are dominated by smoke or spice heat run the risk of overpowering the most delicate aspects of Viognier. Plus, aside from a handful of important exceptions, top-quality Viognier can be found without requiring a fortune.

What Does Viognier Taste Like?

Viognier tends to show generous stone fruit; apricot, peach, white peach, and nectarine are common descriptors, though orange and citrus oil can also be discerned. There is also often a honeyed character to white wines made from Viognier, and this aspect is magnified in sweeter bottlings; late-harvest Viognier, for example, is often ambrosially rich. As Viognier ages — though its lower acidity means that finding older ones are relatively rare, as acid is one of the aspects of white wine that allows it to age — nutty notes like almonds may emerge. Alongside other grapes like Roussanne and Grenache Blanc, as in the J. Lohr "Gesture" RVG , it sings on a palate-coating and savory note. Blended into red wines, as with the previously mentioned Côte-Rôtie, Viognier may lend lift to more savory Syrah.

Serving temperature is key when it comes to Viognier. Cooler bottles will be more lively and brightly fruity in character, whereas less-chilled ones will allow the flowers and honey to shine more brightly. Pouring a well-chilled bottle of Viognier into a glass and sipping it every few minutes as the temperature rises will afford you the opportunity to see firsthand how dramatically serving temperature affects this fascinating wine.

Five Great Viognier Wines

There are countless great Viognier wines on the market today. These five producers, listed alphabetically, are a perfect way to start exploring all that Viognier has to offer.

E. Guigal

The iconic Rhône producer crafts two of the most respected Viogniers in the region: a Condrieu, and Condrieu "La Doriane." Both are excellent, and the latter is generally more concentrated and age-worthy, though pricier. Still, both offer a classic expression of what makes Condrieu such an important and exciting appellation.