

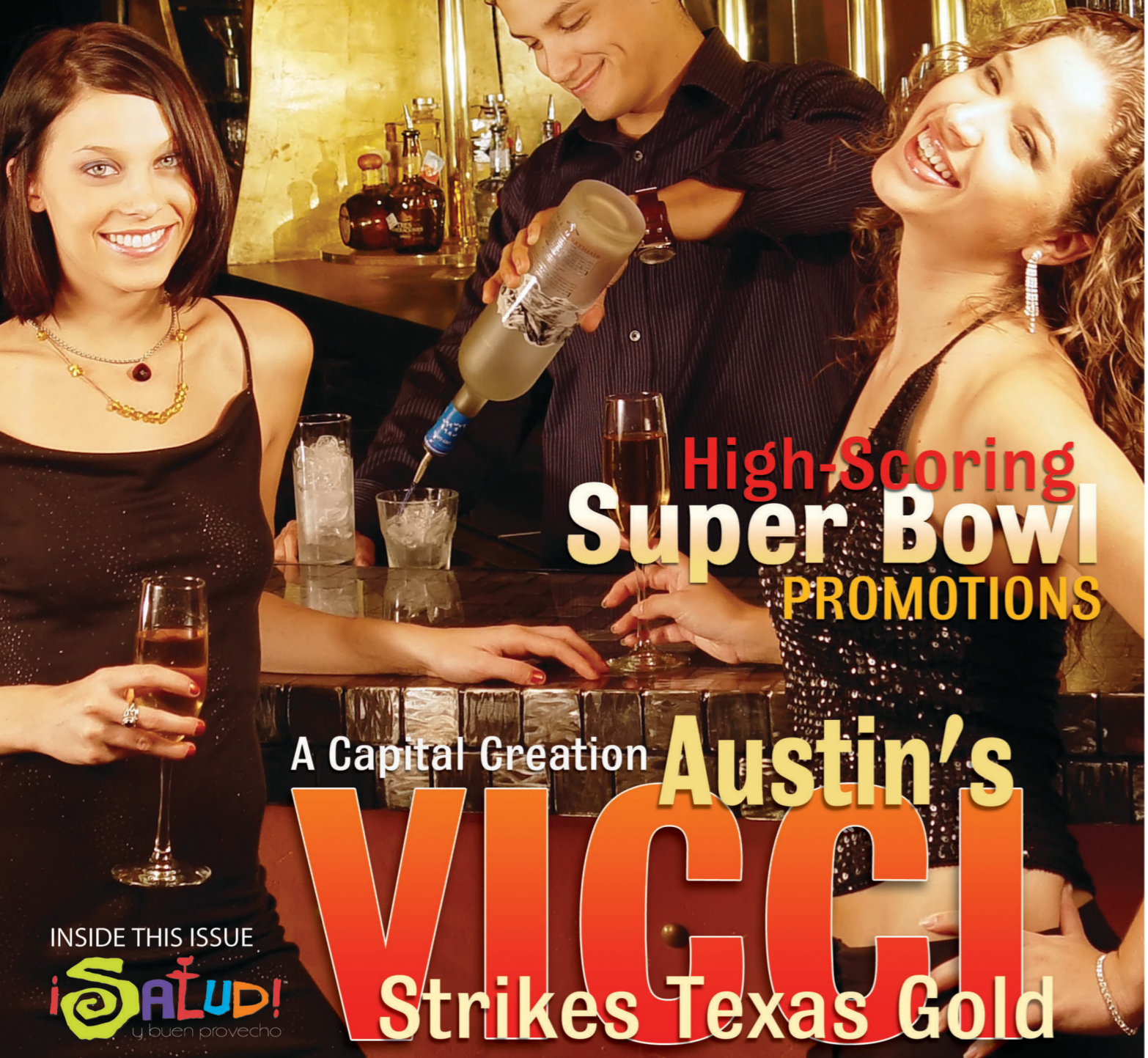
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE



GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

BY FRED M. TIBBITTS JR.

# Grapes Around the Globe

## What's New in Today's Wine Varietals?



What's new in global varietals? Well, I guess that depends on who you are and where you are. If you are just graduating from Coke or Pepsi, maybe it's White Zinfandel Heaven, or if you're trading up from White Zinfandel — hey, it's a whole new world out there — and Chardonnay or Pinot Grigio just may be that next step.

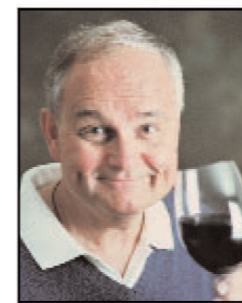
But, for others who have the benefit of their White Zinfandel doctorates or 3-D glasses, there have never been so many delicious choices worldwide, though in some places the names vary just a bit (*i.e.*, Syrah and Shiraz or Sauvignon Blanc and Fume Blanc, to name but two variations).

### North America, France and Germany

For those of us in the United States, it was actually pretty basic once you turned first base (White Zinfandel Lane) and were heading for second; it was Chardonnay on the white side and Cabernet Sauvignon on the red side. Then the California vintners figured out that not everybody wanted red wine with lots of wood, especially *para las mujeres*, and before you knew it, everyone was talking about Merlot, because it was softer and a lot easier to drink without food.

Today, it's a whole new world, no matter where you wake up. On the California side, it's been Pinot Noir, Zinfandel, Sauvignon Blanc and then any number of other favorites (I really liked the Mirassou Petite Syrah during the '80s), but of course lots of Reserve everything. Today, keep an eye on California Syrah, Pinot Grigio replacing Chenin Blanc everywhere and a growing number of Bordeaux blends called "Meritage."

France always has been ready to put some sparkle in our eyes with a million different versions of everything Champagne, lots of Bordeaux and Burgundy for those willing to spend more and dessert wines with names such as "Y'quem" that are not easily pronounced but unforgettable on the palate.



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Spain has sent us their cavas (the best values in sparkling wine) plus reserve red wines priced like California table wines and even "Mad Dogs & Englishmen." Italy has shown us why Tuscany, Veneto, *et al* are destinations for wine and food. Portugal has taught us that Port is a marvelous drink with endless variations in addition to a holiday; and Germany has blown dried their Rieslings to go better with food — to prove that while their high-end luxury wines still are an incredible way to consume mega-carbs, the key to more wine sales is to make German wines that go very easily with food.

### South America to South Africa

Chile has given us great values in Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay — plus Reservas — all the way. The hottest varietals from Chile will be Syrah or Shiraz (depending on the producer) and Carmenere (what was mostly sold in prior years as Merlot or blended with Merlot).

Argentina is known for its Malbec, and that's not changing, but look for new varietals to take hold beyond it and Chardonnay, such as their Torrontes and Tempranillo or possibly Syrah and Johannisberg Riesling.

South Africa is producing great Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and now Shiraz; watch for them all to do well because of their value in the United States.

### New Zealand and Australia

New Zealand has given us Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, and now more and even better of the same, plus Chardonnay, Bordeaux Blends and Riesling. Australia, Australia, Australia. They really have diagnosed the American palate, and they continue to flood the U.S. market with millions of cases of super values at nearly every price point. So, watch for their Shiraz to continue as the top imported red varietal and their Chardonnay to be the top Australian white varietal to America. The Aussie Cabernet-Merlot, Cabernet-Shiraz and Semillon-Chardonnay blends will find more and more satisfied consumers at their very competitive price points.

The largest selling Australian wine is Yellow Tail, but now you have Little Penguin, Jackaroo Big Red, Jindalee Shiraz and lots of others. The New World-Southern Hemisphere wines are full of fruit, easy to drink, pair well with our food, the labels are simple to understand and generally amusing and the value perception is very strong among the wine consuming public.

So, what's new, you ask, in global varietals? Lots of better wine values at every price point from everywhere is my answer. But, if you were to generalize in one direction, it's a new day, and it's mostly New World.

NCB