

LEARN A BIT MORE ABOUT

SEMILLON



There's often a lot of confusion over how you pronounce this wine's name – it's Sem-ee-yon – so now that's out of the way! For many years, Semillon was THE main variety planted in SA – so much so that it became known as 'groendruif' or 'green grape' and accounted for much of the white wine made in the first couple of hundred years of winemaking in the Cape. Gradually this has dwindled, and now Semillon specialists are finding it a tricky grape to sell as a single varietal, tending instead to blend it with Sauvignon Blanc. Which is a crying shame because a good Semillon is a great wine, giving complexity, length, food-friendliness and distinctly-delicious flavours. Long live Semillon!

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Semillon in SA comes, in the main, from the traditional winemaking heartlands of Stellenbosch and Franschhoek. The latter boasts some of the oldest vines in the Cape, some of them well over one hundred years old, which makes incredibly rich and complex wines. The wines from newer plantings (albeit still almost 20 years old) in the Helderberg make very balanced versions with great ageing potential. Semillon is also often grown in the same regions as Sauvignon as they are great partners for each other and love to work together in a blend.

WHAT DOES IT TASTE LIKE?

Like Chenin, it's often difficult to tell from the label whether a Semillon is wooded or unwooded – mostly people don't make that clear. If it is made without oak influence, it is a green, lean machine with lots of yellow citrus, fynbos and herbs. Adding oak gives it a creamy edge and notes of spice and occasionally stone fruit. When the wine ages, it gains a fat, waxy note – think of when you wash a hand-knitted, heavy sweater or if your dog goes out in the rain – a sort of lanolin, oily scent which sounds not so nice but actually tastes delicious.



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WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?

Semillon's home is in Bordeaux where it used to be the most important component of any Bordeaux white blend. Nowadays, with the trend towards Sauvignon, many châteaux are relegating it to second place but wineries which want their wines to last are sticking with the 2/3 Semillon, 1/3 Sauvignon formula. It's another versatile grape, making not just dry, wooded and unwooded versions but also proving a wonderful host for noble rot – indeed, some of the most expensive dessert wines in the world (think Château d'Yquem and other Sauternes wines) are made from predominantly Semillon.

WHAT SHOULD WE EAT WITH IT?

Treat Semillon as if it was Chardonnay with a touch of extra acidity and you won't go far wrong when it comes to food and wine matching. It's great with chicken dishes, full-bodied versions can handle red meat if they have to and Noble Late Harvest Semillons are wonderful matches for cheese – both hard, tangy mature cheddars and delicious, umami-laden blue cheeses as well.

OPTIMAL SERVING TEMPERATURE:

7-12°C

* according to wine.co.za

