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By Roger Morris, Special Contributor

Jun 20, 2012 @ 12:39 PM



Article 0000 Review ★★★★★

If I have a complaint with [New Zealand](#) sauvignons blancs from the Marlboro region — other than the fact that the acidity can sometimes cut right through my Riedel — is that they generally taste so similar that everything seems to be just two degrees of Cloudy Bay. You have gooseberries and green grass, and then you have green grass and gooseberries.

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Credit: Flickr/ Cornerstones Cellars, Napa Valley

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OK, before I get on the Kiwi hit list, I do like the Marlboroughs, but I really enjoy picking up a sauvignon from Northern [California](#). Unless I know the winery well, I have no idea what I'm getting. Oh, I know it will have the varietal characteristics, but I don't which characteristic will be prevalent and what other characteristics it might have brought home with it.

Three new releases illustrate the point.

The 2011 Raymond Napa Valley sauvignon blanc (\$16) is a big wine — grassy and peppery with hints of grapefruit and a touch of creaminess, lots of volume in the mouth (14.5 percent alcohol contributes to that) and sufficient acidity to bring down the curtain. It's quite enjoyable, and for starters I would like to drink it with a plate of linguine with lots of [olive oil](#) and spicy, but not overly hot, peppers and a handful of pistachios for some crunch.

Next, the 2011 Hess Select North Coast sauvignon blanc (\$11) is a very pleasant, affordable sauvignon that veers toward the grape's juicy, fruity side with some white peach skins thrown in to go with the gooseberries. Match this up with some lightly fruity stir-fry pork with [green peppers](#) and pineapples.

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