

The Oregonian

Flavor in wine is a given -- character and originality, now, those are rarities

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Although many wine drinkers think in terms of flavor, really fine wines are all about character. What's the difference? Originality mostly.

Delivering flavors -- red and black fruits, whiffs of pepper, leather, tropical fruits and so forth -- is no great feat in the modern wine world. Indeed, it's expected. But going beyond flavors into that "I can't quite pinpoint it, but I know it's there" quality is rare. It usually comes down to where the grape is grown rather than how the wine is made. All the oak barrels in the world can't do it. Neither can a winemaker's intentions, no matter how sincere and honorable.



MATT KRAMER

Abacela Vineyards Viognier 2004: The white grape variety called viognier (pronounced vee-ohn-yay) is a rare specialty of France's Rhone Valley.

Viognier is seeing a revival of interest, nowhere more so than in the United States. Southern Oregon is not yet cited as one of America's best locales for viognier. But Abacela Vineyards' consistently impressive rendition of this tricky white grape should eventually put Southern Oregon on the world map.

The 2004 vintage is a superb version of viognier: absolutely dry, redolent of tropical fruits and filled with a delicacy and finesse often lacking in more heavy-handed versions from California and southern France.

This is a terrific dry white wine not just for the usual suspects (fish, cheese), but also for more substantial foods where one might normally reach for a red. It's a benchmark viognier comparable or superior to the best of California and even some from France's Rhone Valley. \$19.95. (Distributor is Galaxy Wine Co.)

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