

Expert tips for choosing summer wine



Picture: Getty Images

The days are long and hot, the cicadas are chirping - it's the perfect time to share happy moments with friends or family - washed down with a glass of wine.

From sparkling, rose, white, red - there are plenty of options, so wine author, consultant and sommelier Matt Skinner has come to the party to help.

With the barbecue permanently cooking during the summer months with meat, fish and seafood, or just lovely fresh salads or Asian food, just remember to keep the wine light and fresh.

"There's a tendency for us in Australia to go for the heavy reds, and heavy whites that we drink during the cooler months but in warm weather they get knocked around.

"Because of the temperature the wines change - as soon as you raise the temperature of either a big red or a big white - the alcohol and the oak really poke out of the wine - they don't become particularly attractive to drink," he says.

As for the ideal serving temperature, Skinner says we probably serve our white wines and roses too cold and reds too warm.

"In the end it does depend on personal taste - but I would advise you to pull your whites and roses out of the fridge 10-15 minutes before you plan to drink them to let them come up a few degrees."

Skinner says this helps bring out the aromas and fruitiness of the wine, which you don't want to suppress.

And it's the opposite with reds, he says. Don't be afraid to throw them into an ice-bucket for 10 minutes - it won't chill them, just bring them down a couple of degrees - because in warm weather they will shoot up in temperature really quickly.

Skinner says Australians have the best wines at their doorstep.

"Australia has never made better wine than it's making now.

"It has been a tough decade on the wine industry, but from adversity always comes opportunity - and looking at it now as the dust has settled we've got this raft of new producers trying new things and pushing the boundaries - and to my mind, Australia is the most exciting wine-producing country on the planet."

So here are his suggestions for summer drinking - responsibly of course.

BUBBLES:

With all the festive occasions during summer there are plenty of excuses to drink sparkling, so what's good?

"The quality of Australian sparkling wine has never been better," says Skinner.

"It's a couple of things: Our expertise has increased significantly over the last 10 years.

"We've got better at making the stuff but most importantly we've become very good at sourcing our fruit - mainly from Tasmania."

Skinner is very keen to push home-grown sparkling because it keeps the money in Australia.

"With money being tight this Christmas we're seeing new styles at the bottom of the market like Prosecco - an Italian grape being grown in the King Valley.

Look for the Brown Brothers Prosecco or the Dal Zotto Pucino Prosecco for great value - and you'll be transported to the streets of Verona in Italy immediately.

ROSE:

For those wonderful long lunches rose is the perfect accompaniment - great for an aperitif or to be consumed throughout the meal.

Skinner says that we are starting to get our heads round the style of rose that we want to make in Australia - and be known for.

Aussie winemakers have been taking their cues from the regions such as the south of France and the north of Spain he says.

"It just makes perfect sense in our climate, and with the kinds of food that we eat at this time of year, that we are seeing more and more terrific dry purpose-made rose - as opposed to once upon a time when rose was hatched together with leftovers.

"It's coincided with the kick-off of the 'Rose Revolution' which is a season-long festival about all things that are great about dry rose that's produced in Australia."

Skinner recommends the De Bortoli rose La Boheme Act Two - "it's excellent and retails for about \$24 at First Choice" - from De Bortoli's Yarra Valley winery.

He also says Frenchman Dominique Portet, whose winery is also in the Yarra Valley, makes a fabulous rose, Fontaine rose: "It's about \$20 a bottle and unbelievably good."

These fresher, dryer, lighter varieties rely on pinot grapes, rather than shiraz and grenache varieties.

In the past roses have been very pale, even onion skin colour, and Skinner says colour is important, but it's best to do some homework - and find out which producers are the one's worth seeking out - or ask at the wine shop.

RIESLING:

It's been a long time coming but Skinner says there's been a resurgence of riesling, which is great news.

"I just wish consumers would gravitate and have some faith in this variety because i think nine times out of 10, here in australia we produce a style of riesling that is bone-dry, that is incredibly citrus-charged, and that has beautiful acidity.

Riesling wines are clean, crisp and dry and Skinner says "we have nearly drowned in an ocean of sauvignon blanc over the last five years".

In regard to value for money, Skinner says riesling is the way to go.

"Riesling offers terrific value and it's great summer drinking."

Skinner recommends Jim Barry W Riesling 2012 (about \$15) - "It's terrific as soon as it hits the shelves so drink 2012," he says.

Another great riesling, from the Eden Valley, is Pewsey Vale Riesling 2012, which retails for about \$18.

"I'd happily walk over hot coals for both of those wines," Skinner says.

RED:

Skinner says grenache/shiraz blends are lighter, younger reds that don't spend any time in oak so they are perfect to drink during the warmer weather.

"They make sense with all the barbecue food that we're eating during summer," Skinner says.