

# The Press Democrat

## Wine of the Week: Lail Vineyard's Blueprint, 2018 Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc



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Lail Vineyards Winemaker Philippe Melka is behind our Wine of the Week. (Lail Vineyards)

The Thanksgiving feast can seem like a Jackson Pollack painting -- a capricious jumble of flavors from savory to sweet. While delectable, this colorful mix can confuse the palate. To make pairing effortless, this week we're rolling out our wine grid on Thanksgiving whites and next week, Thanksgiving pinot noirs.

The wine of the week winner in our Thanksgiving whites flight is the Lail Vineyard's Blueprint, 2018 Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc at \$40. This is a gorgeous, food-friendly sauvignon blanc with bright stone fruit of peach and nectarine up front. Playing backup are notes of pineapple and lemon zest. The Blueprint is complex, with tasty layered flavors, and it finishes crisp.

Lail Vineyards is donating 10% of sales for its Blueprint wines to organizations fighting against climate change.

“We are facing a genuine crisis,” said Robin Lail, founder of Napa Valley’s Lail Vineyards. “Collectively we can make a difference.”

Philippe Melka, who produces the label for Lail Vineyards, said what makes the winning sauvignon blanc a standout is how it was tended in the vineyard and the cellar.

“It was picked in great vineyards, located in the best part of Napa, focusing on soil type and microclimates suited to sauvignon blanc,” he said. “I also used a different winemaking approach, fermenting in French oak for texture and aging mostly in steel for purity and vibrancy.”

Sauvignon blanc pairs well with turkey, mashed potatoes and savory dishes because of its citrus-based flavors, coupled with its herb and mineral notes.

Melka said what makes him a good fit to produce sauvignon blanc is his experience with the varietal across the pond.

“Working at Château Haut-Brion, I fell in love with the Haut-Brion Blanc,” he said. “So when I started to work in Napa, I decided to focus on this varietal in order to convince customers and critics that sauvignon blanc is not only a fun wine to drink, but it can be a very complex one.”

What most people don’t realize, Melka explained, is that sauvignon blancs can age gracefully.

“If those wines are well made, they can age as well as the best reds,” he said. “The most challenging part is getting the perfect harmony between acidity, texture and alcohol.”

A native of Bordeaux, Melka earned a degree in geology at the University of Bordeaux. A class in winemaking his senior year changed his fate.

Intrigued by wine, he went on to earn a master's degree in agronomy and enology.

"My master's program focused on trying to connect the dots between soil type and wine style in Saint-Émilion," the winemaker said.

Melka's credits include Château-Haut Brion, Moueix Company and Château Pétrus. In 1994 he came to Napa full time and for the past two decades he has been a winemaking consultant for some of the most esteemed properties in Napa Valley under his company, Atelier Melka.

The winemaker said his strength lies in his hands-off approach.

"I am transparent," Melka said. "I'm not doing any manipulations."

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