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## The Wine Press | Moscato goes down easy in the summer heat

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Special to The Star

The wine industry has long embraced the notion of a 100-point system for scoring wine — even though many wine writers think it misrepresents wine and wine quality.

Wine drinkers are not all the same. As with food, we each like different things. People who score wines by points con their readers into believing that all wines can be judged against one yardstick.

That means the biggest, most powerful wines win. Powerful wines get high scores. Lighter wines get lesser scores. But this doesn't make a lick of sense since wines are made in myriad styles, and that power is only one potential attribute.

Some people don't appreciate power. That doesn't mean they're ignorant of wine's virtues. Rather it is that each of us has different sensory equipment and so we each end up liking different flavors, different foods, different drinks and certainly different wines.

Case in point: Some of the fastest-growing varieties in the U.S. marketplace have nothing to do with power and everything to do with elegance.

Grapes such as riesling, pinot grigio and pinot noir have outshone the sales increases of most other grape varieties over the last five years, and each is offered as a light wine. Pinot grigio, in particular, is light to the point of near invisibility, but that gentle character is part of what makes it popular: It's refreshing, sometimes bracing and never overwhelming.

For the last three years, riesling has seen a meteoric rise among wine grapes, but let's also be clear: Chardonnay is still the most popular white grape in America. It's not that America's love affair with chardonnay is fading (though it may happen someday soon), but that Americans no longer respond to the idea that cabernet and chardonnay are supposed to be their primary wines of choice.

Instead they're drinking many other grapes, and this year, perhaps surprisingly, the ingénue is moscato.

Don't take my word for it: Only a couple of years ago, it was an unknown grape with only a few Italian bottlings. Now most of the big wine companies have versions on the shelves of your favorite stores. Gallo has several of them; one is bottled under its Barefoot label, and the most current data identifies Barefoot as the largest wine brand in the country.

Sutter Home sells a moscato too, as does Beringer, Cupcake, Domaine Ste. Michelle, Mirassou, Robert Mondavi Woodbridge, Montevina and Rex Goliath. There's a Flipflop moscato and a Middle Sister moscato; one of the American pioneers of the variety is the estimable St. Supery winery at Rutherford, Calif., in the Napa region.

The Australians have been some of the most forward-thinking when it comes to moscato. Brands such as Alice White, Angove's, Black Swan (another Gallo project), Deakin Estate, Jacob's Creek, Lindemans and even Yellow Tail are established in the market and represent good value.

Rather than tell you which one of these wines you should drink, I can tell you that each one of them can be tasty on a hot summer evening, especially if fresh and well-chilled. They're usually sweet; they're fragrant and floral, as well as light and unchallenging. This is not complicated wine. This is wine of immediate and simple pleasure.

The version that has carried the banner until these bottlings has been a sparkling, sweet, soft Italian version. If the American and Australian Moscatos don't have quite enough oomph for you, consider the

bubbly versions from Ceretto, Chiarlo, Coppo, Martini, Mionetto, Mondoro, Elio Perrone, Saracco, la Spinetta or Vietti. They have lots of charm and character even if they don't garner big scores or laudatory reviews from the wine press.

They just taste good on a hot day.

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