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Yountville Boasts New Zealand Style of Sauvignon Blanc

Randy Mason of Mason Cellars in Yountville produces a Sauvignon Blanc that comes pretty close to the new Zealand style. “The wine does get compared a lot to New Zealand Sauvignon blanc, and I think it’s due to the brightness of the fruit,” Mason says. “Mason is definitely on the greener side of Sauvignon Blanc.

What’s the secret? “I wish I could tell you,” Mason says somewhat sheepishly. “I don’t have a secret.”

What he does have is 23 years of experience handling Sauvignon Blanc and a vineyard that gives him superior fruit. The convergence works, as the 2001 Mason Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc (\$16) is Kiwi-like in its intense grapefruit and herbaceous flavors and aromas, clean, crisp texture and racy acidity.

He may not call it a secret, but Mason has hit upon a formula that, as he says, produces “Sauvignon Blanc that tastes good. The grapes come from a Yountville vineyard owned by the Pelissas; I’ve been buying Sauvignon Blanc from there since 1982, so I know the site pretty well,” says Mason.

“In the vineyard, we do leaf removal on the morning side; we don’t get sunburned fruit but we do get color and more tropical, grapefruit and pineapple. On the afternoon side, we remove the laterals (side branches) but not the leaves; the grapes in the shade are green when they’re harvested. I think it’s the interplay of golden fruit and green fruit that shows the herbaceous side of Sauvignon Blanc.

“The juice cold-ferments for about 35 days at 44 to 48 degrees, which accentuates the fruit flavors. Fifteen percent is fermented in oak barrels, the rest is stainless steel. I’m not looking for oak flavors, its mouth-feel and texture that I get from the oak.

“It’s no secret. All I know is that it works.”

— *Linda Murphy*