

Two French 2004 Sauvignon Blancs

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Calvet Limited Release Sauvignon Blanc 2004 Bordeaux Levin Sauvignon Blanc 2004 Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France

Yes, it's that time of year when even I relent and recommend a Sauvignon Blanc. Heat and humidity (in the northern hemisphere – sorry, you Australians, Brazilians, Kiwis and South Africans...) call for wine that is refreshing, uncomplicated, strongly aromatic and well delineated. Riesling is of course the obvious choice, but even I need a change every now and then (and only the first tranche of the 2004 German Rieslings that I recommend in [German 2004s – what to buy](#) could be described as, relatively, uncomplicated).

Both these French Sauvignons offer pure refreshment in a bottle, and both show how influential the pungent, fruity New Zealand style of Sauvignon Blanc has been, even in regions that have been producing their own style of Sauvignon for at least a century.

Calvet is one of those old Bordeaux negociants who seem to have been using the same, super- traditional label for at least as long as I have been buying wine (ie three or so centuries). But here comes news from the British importers: "*Calvet, the UK's No 1 off- trade brand from Bordeaux, announces a five- fold increase in sales of their Limited Release Sauvignon Blanc in the last year. The uplift in sales comes further to the introduction of a new label that emphasises the grape variety instead of the region.*"

Yes, that's right! Substituting the words Sauvignon Blanc (forget 'Limited Release' – no- one's fooled by that, surely) for 'Bordeaux' on that old label has resulted in five times more wine sold. And the wine is surely fresher too? Yes, Calvet's new winemaker Benjamin Tueux has a "signature style of modern, fruit- driven wines, and a commitment to natural winemaking and viticulture". This rather florally aromatic wine is certainly bursting with fruit and completely belies the label which, despite the magic word Sauvignon, still shouts Old Bordeaux to me.

I am a fan of Bordeaux's 2004 whites (see [Bordeaux 2004 – dry white tasting notes](#) for more serious, ageworthy examples) and had been thinking of recommending **Calvet Limited Release Sauvignon Blanc 2004** when it was £4.99 at Sainsbury's. But from tomorrow 27 Jul until 16 Aug it will be only £3.99 chez Sainsbury and very good value too. With a mere 11.5 per cent alcohol, it's truly refreshing. Just don't hang on to it. I'm sure it is at its best now and is definitely not a long distance runner. (Benjamin, by the way, is busy experimenting with trendy, even more aromatic Sauvignon Gris, and expects his 2005 Sauvignon to be even better.) I'm told that this wine is available only in the UK – for which many apologies to non- British wine lovers – although I see that Calvet has a good presence in Holland.

Another French winemaker exhibiting strong antipodean tendencies is Thierry Merlet who once worked at Petaluma in South Australia but is now based in the Loire where he makes wine for David Levin, owner of the Capital Hotel next to Harrods in London. Levin first ventured into wine 17 years ago with some vines in Oisly and Choussy and now has a winery nearby at Bourré west of Tours. For many years he called his wine Le Vin de Levin which rather jolly joke seems to have abandoned now that the wine has improved considerably.

Levin Sauvignon Blanc 2004 is a most attractive halfway house between a Marlborough Sauvignon and a Sancerre. Purists might argue there is too much fruit and too little minerality. Cloudy Bay fans might miss that note of asparagus. But I really enjoyed it – and welcomed the way that its screwcap seemed designed to encourage finishing it as an aperitif over several hot evenings. This one is 13 per cent by the way. It looks smart – has far more fruit than most 2004 Sancerres and Pouilly Fumés that have so far come my way (see [2004 – not a great vintage for Sauvignon](#)), and I don't think the £7.99 that Virgin Wines www.virginwines.com will be asking for it *from early next month* is unduly rapacious. Just a little maybe...

The equally smart website www.levinwines.co.uk has a section called Order Wines which for the moment gives only the Capital Hotel address but Levin would be mad not to set up a direct sales operation in France, not least to all those Brits so obviously and audibly (every time we go to the market) now living and holidaying here. At five euros a bottle, I might even buy some.