

# White Wines from Red Grapes

**A creative local vintner turns red wines inside out.**


**FACT: NEARLY ALL GRAPES HAVE PALE-COLORED PULP INSIDE**, even red grapes. Red wines become red not because of the color of the juice inside the grapes, but because of the skins on the outside. When red grapes are crushed and fermented with their outer skins to make a red wine, the heat of that fermentation extracts red color and flavors. Take away those outer skins, and those characteristics no longer play a part in the final wine. In other words, it is possible to make a white wine out of red grapes.

It's not a new concept. Winemakers have been doing this for ages—in fact, two out of the three main varieties used to make Champagne, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, are red. But leaving the red skins behind to make still white wines from reds is a more recent trend.

A few local winemakers, including Mari Jones of Emeritus Vineyards in Sebastopol and Shalini Sekhar of Waits-Mast in the Anderson Valley have been experimenting with making still white wines from Pinot Noir—essentially a sparkling wine without the fizz. But more recently, Cindy Cosco of Sonoma's Passaggio Wines has been experimenting with making still white wines from rustic Italian reds like Nebbiolo and Sangiovese.

When she founded the label in 2007, Cosco's intent was to be a white wine producer. She's also made some fantastic reds over the years, but the 2024 portfolio is once again focused primarily on whites. "I've come full circle," she says—but in a more unique and interesting way than she ever thought.

Her first foray into these whites-from-reds was a happy accident. "I had done a Cab Franc Blanc for a friend back in 2018—it was supposed to be a rosé, but it came out white. He sold out, people loved it so much," says Cosco. "So, I thought, I'll try it again, but on purpose. And, if this last year taught me anything, it's that people are looking for something different. When you tell them you have a white red, it creates interest."

Winemakers like Cosco and Jones tweak the production process when working a red into a white wine. The grapes are picked earlier; fermentation temperatures are lower; and the winemaking is done in neutral, stainless-steel vessels—no oak. The result is a lighter, higher acid, lower alcohol version of their red-expression counterparts, perfect for sipping on the patio on a spring afternoon. 

—Stacy Briscoe



## PASSAGGIO WINES

### 2024 Sangiovese

**Bianco, \$29**

"When you taste it blind, you'd never know it was a red, but you definitely wouldn't know what kind of white wine it is," says Cosco. The surprise, she comments, is how the grape's innate florality that shines through—maybe even more so from the delicate winemaking process.

## PASSAGGIO WINES

### 2024 Cabernet

**Franc Blanc, \$30**

Just a delicate nod to the red wine original, Passaggio's Cab Franc Blanc is layered with subtle herbaceous notes and red-berry fruits, lifted by a bright, vibrant acidity.

## PASSAGGIO WINES

### 2024 White Nebbiolo, \$29

"Tar and roses" is a common descriptor for this native-Piemonte red wine that typically reaches alcohol levels of 14% or above. Whilst the nose gives a little wink to white roses, the palate blooms with juicy just-ripe white plums and strawberry, balanced by a lean 12.9% ABV. "Pair with seafood or white pasta dishes," advises Cosco.

Cindy Cosco, top, of Sonoma's Passaggio Wines is making white wines from Italian and French red grapes.