HOUSE TONIC

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SOHO HOUSE'S DRINK MAGAZINE

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FALLTERNATIVES

what to drink this autumn

Change your drinking habits and try something new this autumn. Christopher Cooper and Jaimee Anderson recommend wines to tempt you as the weather cools down.

Christopher Cooper, European sommelier for Soho House, on different wines to try this Autumn.

It's too early to start tucking into dirty Bordeaux or big Aussie Shiraz but as the nights draw in and menus become more autumnal then consider some of the great middleweight champions of wine. We may be into the firm fall favourites, like Viognier, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel – and don't get me wrong, these are some of the greatest wines in the world and I love them dearly – but there are plenty of awesome alternatives out there at pretty reasonable prices.

For whites, why not look at Pinot Gris? This isn't Pinot Grigio, as generally Pinot Gris are a bit heavier and have much more richness and depth compared to the Grigio styles of Italy. Pinot Gris comes from Alsace and often from Oregon and New Zealand, as well as from Germany where its local name is Grauburgunder...bit of a mouthful but an amazing wine and the most popular in Soho House Berlin. (Available at Café Boheme, Electric Diner, Soho Diner, Little House and many others.)

Or what about Riesling? This brilliantly versatile grape goes from the entirely bone-dry styles of Australia all the way to super-sweet dessert wines of Germany; yet it's the styles in between that work best when matching wines with richer dishes. Look at New Zealand and Washington State for interesting styles, and don't be afraid to go back to where it all began – Germany. (Available at Babington House, Dean Street Townhouse and Soho House Berlin.)

Lastly, try Furmint. It may be the principal grape that goes into the legendary Tokaji dessert wine, but increasingly dry Furmint is served as a Chardonnay alternative. Richer and more nutty in flavour, these wines are perfect with white meats or simply guzzling during the late evenings of an Indian summer. (Available at Hoxton Grill.)

And for the reds, think about Zweigelt, the most widely planted grape in Austria (there's some in Canada too), a Pinot Noir alternative. This smooth yet earthy red is perfect for more delicate autumnal root vegetables and tomato-based dishes. (Available at Soho House Berlin.)

Sangiovese is the king of grapes in Italy and difficult to pin down in terms of flavour because of the variety and differences between the wines and the regions. For autumn I would stick to decent Chianti and the king that is Vino Nobile de Montepulciano. For a seriously good wine go to Dean Street Townhouse and sample 'Le Difese', an alternative label from the same producers of the legendary Sassicaia. (Sangiovese is available at all Pizza Easts, all Clubs and Cecconi's.)

Mencia – pronounced 'men-theea' – is an amazing alternative to Rioja. We all know and like Rioja but I'm sure we've all tasted some stinkers too, and if you're tired of Tempranillo then this is a more reasonable yet punchier alternative from Bierzo, in north west Spain. Great with tomato dishes and spicy sausage. (Available at Shoreditch House, High Road House and Dean Street Townhouse.)

Jaimee Anderson, sommelier at Soho House West Hollywood, on her favourite wine for fall, Nebbiolo.

My wine recommendation for fall is Nebbiolo. The most famous examples of this grape are from Barolo and Barbaresco of the Piedmont region. And yes, these are excellent wines, but some lesser-known Nebbiolo-producing regions of Northern Italy are often overlooked, so let's shine some light on them. I want to showcase two in particular: the Donnas DOC and the Valtellina Superiore DOCG. These appellations not only show off the range of Nebbiolo, but they also offer a unique expression of it. Furthermore, they're tailor-made to pair with the seasonal dishes that come along at this time of year.

What makes Nebbiolo capable of producing such interesting wines? The grape is naturally thin-skinned and high in acidity and tannins. It buds early and ripens late, requiring a long growing season. It's an extremely difficult grape because it responds poorly to most soils and climates, yet somehow works in the most unexpected places. It performs better in cooler regions, preferring only to ripen properly in tiny areas where adequate sunshine and drainage exist.

The Donnas DOC is in the region of Valle d'Aosta. It sits on the border with France, just northwest of Piedmont.It is home to the highest vineyards in Italy, and with that come great challenges. Soils range from sand to granite to clay, providing different pockets suitable for different grapes. In fact, this region nourishes several indigenous grapes that over time have got used to the severe conditions. Higher elevations and sandy soils have also protected these isolated parcels from the devastating phyloxxera pest, so – unusually – many grapes come from vines grown on their original rootstock.Nebbiolo – or as it's called here, Picotendro – must make up 85% of the final wine, allowing producers to add either Freisa or Neyret to the blend. This addition of fruit helps to round out the harshness of the acidity and tannins too. The wines usually have an earthy, spicy fragrance with almond flavours mixed with black fruit and granite. These are very different to those found in Piedmont, where tar and rose flavours are the norm. Nonetheless, some have deemed this appellation the "mountain equivalent to Barolo". I'll leave that for you to decide, but you can always trust the wines from this area to be true to their terroir.

Another lesser-known Nebbiolo-producing appellation is Valtellina Superiore DOCG, and here Nebbiolo is called Chiavannesca. Valtellina Superiore is in Lombardia, a region better known for sparkling wine. Here a minimum of 90% Chiavannesca is required, allowing producers to add small amounts of other local grapes. Extremely steep slopes mean that winemaking has to be done on a smaller scale. The rough terrain slows the vines, leading to lower yields. This results in complex wines, and they illustrate the staggering differences between producers, plus the influence climate has. Like other Nebbiolo-producing regions, the vineyards are south facing. The stony soil helps to retain heat and disperse it into the vines at night and the nearby mountains also help to trap heat. All of these unique elements contribute to a feminine, perfume-y style of Nebbiolo. Valtellina is also known for its five sub-zones which all carry their own reputation. Of the five, keep an eye out for Sessella and Inferno.

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