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BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE

The Enthusiast

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SIPS

YOU MAY NOT LIKE CHARDONNAY, BUT YOU'LL LOVE CHABLIS

BY ELLEN BHANG | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The instant a wine professional hears this from a customer: "I don't like chardonnay, too buttery, too much oak," it's the perfect opportunity to introduce chablis. This classic Burgundian white offers a fresh, steely profile that manages to change minds, even with the delightful irony that chablis is made with the chardonnay grape. The customer probably doesn't have a quarrel with the grape, but with how New World winemakers barrel-ferment in new oak or overuse oak chips.

Sommeliers and retailers agree that chablis and seafood of every stripe is a match made in heaven. Ralph Hersom, wine director Ralph's Wines & Spirits in Hingham (now in a new location on Lincoln Street),

loves these bottles. "Chablis is the truest expression of chardonnay," he says. "It's a wine with a sense of place." A former wine director at New York's Le Cirque restaurant, Hersom says the best chardonnay in the region grows on sun-catching, southwest-facing slopes with Kimmeridgean soil underlying the best vineyards. In some, fossilized oyster shells are in the limestone and clay, deposited millions of years ago when the land was an ancient sea bed. Could this be a reason why these pours are so delicious with shellfish?

Hersom's wife, Kim, a personal chef, will offer in-store food and wine pairings this summer. Chances are good that chablis paired with seafood will be on the docket. And if a \$42

chablis premier cru is out of your range, Hersom recommends a \$15 La Chablisienne "Pas Si Petit" Petit Chablis 2011 (a category grown in less prestigious vineyards, but quite nice from this producer). He's enthusiastic about pairing tasty bites with stellar pours. "Once a somm, always a somm," he says.

Recently we met visiting Christian Moreau, owner of the domaine that bears his name, at Island Creek Oyster Bar. The winemaker lived in Canada for 11 years, then returned to Chablis in the 1970s to help his father, Guy, with the vineyard. Today, Christian Moreau's son, Fabien, the sixth generation, runs the domaine. "I tell him, 'Make the chablis that you like,'" says the father, heartily endorsing his son's skills in the cellar and decision to move toward organic viticulture.

Results show in a glass of Domaine Christian Moreau Chablis 2011, an elegantly structured wine with refreshing acidity, pear and citrus notes, and tasting unmistakably of

the region's mineral aroma and tang. Restaurant general manager Tom Schlesinger-Guidelli explains that these crisp whites show off the oysters' "merroir" (a play on the word "terroir").

For a splurge this summer, Schlesinger-Guidelli recommends chablis grand cru with lobster dipped in butter. This top-level of chablis is matured in oak — but artfully so, lending dimension and richness.

So you'll love chablis, and you may also learn that you love chardonnay aged in oak — just done the right way.

Domaine Christian Moreau Pere & Fils Chablis 2011 (around \$26) at Marty's Fine Wines, 675 Washington St., Newton, 617-332-1230; Charles Street Liquors, 143 Charles St., Boston, 617-523-5051. La Chablisienne "Pas Si Petit" Petit Chablis (around \$15) at Ralph's Wines & Spirits, 211 Lincoln St., Hingham, 781-749-9463.

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