



FROM THE WINE CELLAR OF RITA JAMMET

is wine a health food?

The wellness biz would have you believe so. With labels like biodynamic, organic, and the latest (and Cameron Diaz-approved) “clean” wine, there’s a lot to sift through. Rita Jammet, Rach’s pal and La Caravelle Champagne’s Chief Bubble Officer, is here to help.



How can something with such beautiful origins not be good for you?!

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Happy and healthy new year! This moment usually brings a few resolutions: fresh start, more exercise, better diet. In Americans’ quest for a healthy lifestyle, we’ve created booming businesses out of organic foods, probiotics, plant-based proteins, and mocktails. Now that quest is extending to the wine we’re consuming: How are the grapes farmed? Are any chemicals and additives used in the winemaking? Is the vineyard environmentally friendly?

There’s a yearning to get closer to Mother Nature—or at the

very least, not harm her with our choices—and thanks to that, our wine options have expanded: natural, organic, biodynamic, clean. What do they all mean? Read on for the nitty-gritty on all of that. But remember that the most important thing in choosing a wine is that it tastes good to you!

NATURAL

Affectionately called “natty” by fans, natural wine is not legally defined or regulated, but it is typically organic and/or biodynamic, which means it’s made with minimal intervention (meaning farmed with no chemicals and not souped up with synthetic additives during fermentation). While natural wine may be having a moment, it’s

not new: It originated in France (in Beaujolais and the Loire Valley) during the late 1980s as a reaction against industrialized and mechanized wines. A group of vintners yearned for more rustic, traditional wines, so they returned to their ancestors’ techniques, including picking the grapes by hand and using no sulfites. The idea is “nothing added, nothing taken away.”

Some natural wines are really good and they tend to be low in alcohol. They’re best chilled, and most of them are meant to be consumed young. Some natural wines can be funky, but if you’re into that, go for it! There are lots of delicious options, so just talk to your wine seller or poke around the natural section of the shop.

ORGANIC

Because of strict regulation in the United States (much more so than in the EU), it's not easy for a winery to be certified organic. The grapes grown must be organic (i.e., in a manner that protects the environment and the purity of the soil), their conversion to wine must be organic, any agricultural ingredients added (such as yeast) must be organic, and there must be no sulfites added in the winemaking. (Sulfites are routinely added to wines to cap the fermentation process and preserve flavor profiles.)

RECOMMENDED BY RITA

Taste the trend with "better-for-you" bottles.

1

Abbazia di Novacella Kerner 2019

Made in a 12th-century monastery in Italy, this organic white is very lively, with notes of peaches, apricots, and tangerines. \$16.99

2

Domaine La Grange Tiphaine Vin de France Sparkling Rosa 2017

Refreshing and delicious, this *pétillant naturel* ("naturally sparkling" in French) is an organic blend of mostly Gamay and Cabernet Franc. \$21.99

3

Domaine des Marrans Beaujolais Villages 2018

Meant to be drunk young, this bright organic Gamay is easy-drinking, fruit-forward, and food-friendly. \$16.99

4

Finca Torremilanos Montecastrillo Tinto 2018

This biodynamic Spanish red is built around the Tempranillo grape. Balancing dark fruitiness and earth with a hint of fresh herb, it stands up well to steak or lamb. \$12.99

BIODYNAMIC

Twenty years older than organic farming, this nearly century-old agricultural practice favors a holistic approach. Biodynamic winemakers take organic farming to another level by syncing chemical-free farming with cosmic and lunar aspects, like constellations and the lunar cycle. Animals are incorporated in biodynamic farms (things like cow horns packed with manure compost are buried as soil fertilizer). All of this is perceived as hippie-dippie wizardry by some, but this method of winemaking can produce wonderful results. Fun fact: There are only about 600 certified biodynamic wineries in the world, some making really excellent juice—Domaine Leroy in Burgundy, Bonny Doon in California, and Cristal Champagne, to name a few.

CLEAN

The newest wine buzzword, *clean*, has stirred great controversy. There's no legal definition, technical requirement, or regulation of the term. So how did clean wines come about? Many traditional wines contain a number of additives, which are not disclosed on labels. This lack of transparency paved the way for new wines that lean into wellness jargon, like *healthy lifestyle* or *clean crafted*. The irony is that some of these newcomers (including some backed by celebrities, like Cameron Diaz's Avaline Wines) are no more transparent about their wines: The grapes are not listed on the bottles or the brands' websites, and neither are the precise regions where the wines are produced. Instead, they use lingo such as "Pairs well with: fresh-cut flowers and your favorite meal." Or they promise no hangover the next morning, no matter how much you drink. I'm here to tell you that overindulging in any wine—or *anything*—will slow you down the next day. So, is this great marketing? Absolutely. Great wine? Debatable. But if it makes you happy, drink up! Just not too much...



FROM THE BAR OF JOHN CUSIMANO

FILTHY MARTINI

1 Spanish olive, plus a splash of brine • 1 cocktail onion, plus a splash of brine • 1 cornichon, plus a splash of brine • 1½ oz. gin • ¾ oz. dry vermouth

Spear the olive, onion, and cornichon on a cocktail pick. Pour the gin, vermouth, and brines into a cocktail shaker filled with ice; stir until chilled. Strain into a chilled martini glass. Garnish with the cocktail pick.



“THIS MARTINI HAS GOT UMAMI—AND LOTS OF IT. IT WILL CHILL YOU OUT, WARM YOU UP, AND SATISFY YOU WITH A LITTLE SNACK.”

—JOHN

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rachael ray

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