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Summer wines: Make a splash

By Bill Ward

Some have fizz. Most have pizzazz. And, of course, they all have a certain buzz attached to them, and not just the type that imbibing can provide (in moderation, of course).

The weather might not yet be hot, but these summer beverages certainly are. Whether summer actually ever gets here, or we end up with one of those five-month springlike seasons (works for me!), there's no shortage of cool cooling-off options to whet/wet your appetite.

From rosés to rose water and rose petals (as cocktail ingredients), from flavored vodkas to flavor-packed vermentinos and viogniers, it promises to be a spirited season. Fresh ingredients in cocktails, refreshing white varietals, some easy reading and even a new "fishy" beer are on this languid summertime's docks and docket.

Reading

Summer readings should be snappy or sappy. They should transport your spirit to a better place, literally or figuratively. Italy, perhaps, or Scotland. Or maybe just to the state known as mirth.

The latter is the inevitable destination for anyone perusing Kingsley Amis' "Everyday Drinking" (\$19.99. Bloomsbury, 294 pages), a collection of the late, great bon vivant's rapier-witted essays on intoxicants. For those who want a little bite with their nips, this is essential, laugh-out-loud reading.

Another British sage who's sadly no longer with us, Michael Jackson, left behind "Scotland and Its

Whiskies" (\$19.95, DBP, 141 pages), a beautifully written travelogue and appreciation of this beautiful land and its distinctive whiskies.

Also enabling readers to waft their way to a faraway land in bellissimo fashion is Sergio Esposito's "Passion on the Vine" (\$24.95, Broadway, 284 pages). This witty remembrance overflows with the amore that one would expect from a book subtitled "A Memoir of Food, Wine and Family in the Heart of Italy."

There's a different style, but no less passion, at play in Gary Vaynerchuk's "101 Wines Guaranteed to Inspire, Delight and Bring Thunder to Your World" (\$19.95, Rodale, 232 pages). This ever-so-New Joisey merchant brings to the page the same outsized personality that has made his videos must-sees for fans throughout the wine world (sans, alas, those great spit takes).

For those seeking a bit more heft, Charles Bamforth's "Grape vs. Grain" (\$27, Cambridge University, 197 pages), shines a socio-techno-econo-historical light on beer and wine.

Another thoroughly researched work, Julia Flynn Siler's "The House of Mondavi: The Rise and Fall of an American Wine Dynasty," has just arrived in paperback (\$15, Gotham, 464 pages). A history of Minnesota native Robert Mondavi's ups and downs, it's a page-turner and a way better wine-soaked soap opera than TV's "Falcon Crest" ever thought about being.