

## southern HEMISPHERE



Wine and liquor manager Steven Slaughter and store manager John Alarcon of Major Market in Fallbrook, CA, stock Toi Toi Sauvignon Blanc on shelves, in the cooler, and in case displays.

# Sauvignon Makes a Splash in SoCal

**TOI TOI** OFFERS "EXCEPTIONAL VALUE" IN A TRENDING CATEGORY

story and photos by **Natasha Swords**

**Much like the** widespread native toetoe grass—famous for its drooping, creamy gold flower heads—for which it's named, Marlborough Wine Limited's Toi Toi label represents a staple of the New Zealand landscape. Toi Toi is a consistent performer that delivers on all expectations for the country's Sauvignon Blanc—think vivid acidity and expressive fruit—in a way that makes it as easy to pair with food as it is to drink it on its own. According to Marlborough Wine Limited director Sam Joyce,

"Toi Toi Sauvignon Blanc captures Marlborough's soul in every bottle: It's crisp and vibrant, and it truly tells the story of New Zealand's sun, soil, and spirit—a pure taste of [the] terroir that brings refreshing consistency to American wine lovers." It is currently selling 18,500 cases across 25 U.S. states; we talked to four buyers in Southern California who count themselves among its fans.

Take Steven Slaughter. Slaughter knows wine, but what matters most to him is knowing which wines his cus-

tomers like. For 25 years, he has been the wine and liquor manager at Major Market, which has been operating in the town of Fallbrook, 60 miles north of San Diego, for over 40 years.

"We're all about catering to our community's needs," says Slaughter. As an example, he points to a case display of Toi Toi 2024 Sauvignon Blanc. "This is something I love for our customers," he asserts. "Big grapefruit flavors, easy to drink, unpretentious, and a great price point of \$14.99. I would call this a very quaffable, affordable wine that totally



**Ayad Jirjas, owner of Sports Arena Liquor in San Diego, CA, suggests Toi Toi Sauvignon Blanc to his customers who have grown to trust his recommendations. “We had to reorder shortly after our first order to keep it in stock. It really sells that fast,” says Jirjas.**



**At Jug Liquor Store in San Diego, Nada Gorla not only carries Toi Toi Sauvignon Blanc, which she says her customers appreciate for its value, but also currently features the wine in a floor display.**

appeals to our customers. This would work in restaurants too for about \$12 per glass.”

“The New Zealand wine category is on fire,” asserts John Alarcon, who has served as Major Market’s store manager for 37 years. “Wines like Toi Toi offer exceptional value, with lots of dimensions within the taste profile. This one is likable for entry-level customers but complex enough for more educated consumers too. Compared to grassy Napa Sauvignon Blancs, New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs offer more fruit-forward options that our local demographic appreciates. The name is catchy, and the label looks great. I like drinking Toi Toi myself with spicy chicken enchiladas.”

Ayad Jirjas, a former division manager at Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits, is the owner of Sports Arena Liquor in San Diego, where he makes a point of personally greeting customers on a daily basis. “The liquor store business is all about relationships,” he

notes, “just like the alcohol distributor business. I’ve taken my deep experience in sales at Southern Glazer’s and applied it to retail. It’s essential for my business that I’m genuine in my recommendations because my customers trust me, and that’s something that can’t be replaced.” Toi Toi Sauvignon Blanc is a perfect example. “[It] offers my customers a great alternative to the same old brands they’ve been drinking, and the price point is unbeatable at \$14.99,” he adds. “I recommend [it] to all my wine customers who prefer a crisp, refreshing profile, and they always thank me afterward. It’s good for business.”

Marlene Kirchner is the beverage director at Via Verde Country Club in San Dimas, designed by notable golf-course architect Bill Bell in the late 1960s. Nestled among rolling hills with a stunning view of the San Gabriel Mountains, it’s known for the flawlessness with which its facilities—from the golf course and tennis courts to the

restaurant and bar—are operated. “Our clientele expects perfection on the course, at the restaurant, and certainly in the wines we serve,” Kirchner says. “After a day on the course or the courts, some people want that perfect glass of clean, white, refreshing wine. Toi Toi Sauvignon Blanc delivers precisely that. It’s intensely fruited yet balanced with a delicate texture and bright acidity. When we recommend it to our customers, they always thank us for the suggestion. Toi Toi helps us round out the perfect customer experience.” <sup>14</sup>

**Toi Toi 2024 Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$15)**

Scents of cut grass, gooseberry, and sweet basil lead to a twist of lime and thyme. Gardenia and kiwi add tropical flair, while high-toned acidity maintains the wine’s fresh appeal.

**92** —Meridith May