

## NEW BEVERAGES

# Straight from the Vine

*The premium flavor and nutrition of varietal grapes isn't just for wine anymore.*

By Heather Landi

**M**ention grape juice and most consumers think of the heavy, musky flavor and deep purple color of concord grapes, which are most often used to make mainstream grape juice and imitated in grape-flavored sodas. However, just as Granny Smith and Golden Delicious are different varieties of apples, there also are different grape varieties, each with its own distinctive flavor and characteristics. A new all-natural, premium grape juice is setting out to change consumer perception by offering the intense flavor and nutrition of varietal grapes in a bottle that doesn't come with a cork.

First Blush (Santa Barbara, Calif., USA) is the first 100-percent all-natural grape juice made from varietal grapes and comes in flavors Cabernet, Merlot, Chardonnay and Rosé. There is no added sugar, preservatives, caffeine and, oh yeah, no alcohol.

"Merlot, chardonnay, zinfandel, these are grapes first and foremost, before they're wine," points out Aris Janigian, First Blush co-founder. "These grapes have roots, literally and figuratively, going back thousands of years and for most of their history these varietal grapes were used in three ways: to make wine, to eat at the table and to crush for juice."

Janigian points out that it has only been within the last 60 to 70 years that varietal grapes have become associated almost exclusively with wine.

Janigian's family has a history of wine grape farming in California, where he experienced for himself the intense, delicious flavor of different varietal grapes. "Very few people understand how delicious these grapes are in their own right. There's no comparison between the complexity and cleanness of how these grapes taste versus a concord grape, so I had this idea of 'grape all grown up,'" he remarks.



\* FIRST BLUSH combines the complex flavor and health benefits of varietal grapes, without the wine buzz.

Launched earlier this summer in California, First Blush is available exclusively in Whole Foods Market stores in 11 states with a national roll out planned over the next few months.

Janigian says he decided to launch with the four varietal grape flavors as they represented the most familiar wine grapes to consumers. Each varietal juice has a distinct flavor profile, he says. Cabernet juice offers the flavors of blackberries, black cherry and black currant while Merlot juice has flavors of subtle currant, cherry, plum and vanilla. On the lighter side, Chardonnay has hints of peach, apricot and apple and Rosé made from white zinfandel grapes has touches of raspberry, strawberry and cranberry flavors. The company may launch other varietals, such as syrah or pinot, in the near future.

Beyond a premium taste experience, consumers also benefit from the naturally occurring polyphenol antioxidants found in grape juice, such as resveratrol, one of the antioxidants touted as a health benefit of red wine. Consumer interest in the product has ranged from mothers who want a healthy drink for their kids, to people who want an alternative to wine during meals and even non-wine drinkers who want a nutritious, refreshing drink.

"The feedback we get after people taste the product is that they're surprised by how clean and refreshing it tastes. Once people taste it, they automatically understand, 'this is not my mom and dad's grape juice,'" Janigian says.

Given the natural health characteristics of varietal grapes, First Blush is committed to global health and wellness by donating five cents of every bottle sold to the World Health Organization. First Blush is available at a suggested retail price of US\$3.79 to US\$3.99 per 16-ounce bottle. **BW**

[firstblushjuice.com](http://firstblushjuice.com)