

Purbeck U3A Wine Appreciation – Spring 2012

Sauvignon Blanc (*sauvage* – *wild*):

Introduction

A 'Noble' grape originally from France, from two areas specifically, the Loire and Bordeaux.

Grape Production

Demanding grape for the wine maker being sensitive to the ideal moment for picking. Under ripe it is tart and lacking in aroma, overripe it loses its freshness and intensity. Rarely oaked

Countries of Production

Lighter styles are now available from all over the world, South African (thin and bland but notable examples are Mulderbosch and Buitenverwachting) and Chilean (but struggles with the grape) being the closest in style. Australian vineyards are too warm generally. Californian Sauvignon (Napa valley) often uses oak both in fermentation and maturation, producing a bigger, richer style which can be quite a shock after the fruit-driven styles from other parts of the world.

In the Loire, Sauvignon makes the fine wines of the central vineyards – Sancerre and Pouilly Fume - limestone, chalky and flint soils. (These were seen as the benchmarks for the Sauvignon grape but today New Zealand Sauvignon, especially from the Marlborough region (north of the south island), is a strong competitor and is often claimed to be Sauvignon's homeland although only planted there in 1973! From this area the grape produces wines that are more pungent and with more character than anywhere else and is more reliable eg Montana, Villa Maria and Cloudy Bay).

The Wine

Medium to medium-full alcohol content. Young smells and so drink the wine when it is 1-2 years old.

1. Appearance

pale-coloured sometimes light yellow or green

2. Nose

A powerful, sometimes pungent nose of grass, nettles, grass, elderflower, gooseberries (sometimes described as 'cats' pee too.)

3. Taste

Dry wine with marked, refreshing acidity and a powerful sometimes pungent taste of grass, nettles, grass, elderflower, gooseberries

4. Aromatics

Aromas are attractive, appealing and said to be very inviting.

5. Blending qualities

In Bordeaux, Sauvignon is softer and more mute in character due to the warmer climate and are also used to add refreshing acidity to the sweet wines of Sauternes and Barsac.

6. Food: Acidity in the wine means it makes great contrast to many foods which have a forceful flavour e.g. goats cheese, seafood dish, mussels.

Cabernet Sauvignon

Introduction

One of the greatest red-wine grapes of the world though initially from Bordeaux (left bank Medoc and Graves regions of Gironde and Garonne estuaries).

Grape Production

A small and thick-skinned grape with abundant colour, tannin and acid. This grape gives a high ratio of skin to juice and therefore lots of colour and tannin. It is the high proportion of phenols in the grape's thick skins that gives the wine its colour and tannin. Grows on most soils especially if free draining, gravel soils and in a warm climate. Improves with contact to oak and the grape seems to have a natural affinity with vanilla and spice elements of newly made oak barrels.

Age is an advantage.

Countries of Production

Chile – Maipo Valley

Argentina - Mendoza

USA California - Napa Valley, Sonoma and also wines from Washington State

Australia all states but notably Barossa, Coonawarra, Yarra,

New Zealand – cool climate difficult but Hawkes Bay

South Africa – hit level low

Bulgaria

The Wine

1. Appearance

Deep colour medium to high alcohol content

2. Nose

Rich and fruity character, blackcurrant, vanilla, spice, oak

3. Taste & Aromatics

Flavour of blackcurrant/cassis

4. Blend qualities

Good blending material (e.g. with Merlot or Cabernet Franc or Shiraz). All claret (red Bordeaux) is a blend of grape varieties. This helps to spread the risk of one variety failing and also to make a better wine.

5. Food: Robust dishes such as grilled meat, lamb, steak & kidney pie, beef casserole or hot pot.

Merlot

The 'friendly noble' red grape which is low in acidity, softer in texture, less tannic, sweeter in flavour and ready to drink sooner than Cabernet Sauvignon (CS). The grape is also larger, thinner-skinned which produces wines that are higher in alcohol than CS. It matures earlier and is happier in colder, heavier soils in which CS struggles to ripen.

It has a *soft texture* which is echoed in its smells and tastes which when fully ripe are a smooth, blueberry-blackberry-plum character. It readily takes to oak and is said to be less complex than CS.

Colour - medium to dark

Alcohol - fairly high

Acid - low to moderate

Tannin - moderate, supple

Aroma characteristics -

Cool climate/less ripe fruit – eucalyptus, bruised leaf, red berry fruit, bell pepper

Warm –climate/riper fruit – blueberry, blackberry, ripe plum, jammy

Food: Cold ham, country pate, game bird, meaty casserole, Camembert or Brie cheese

International Sources:

France :

Bordeaux - right bank (right of Gironde Estuary and Garonne river). Half of the red grapes grown in the area is Merlot which is twice as much as CS. Best known are **St Emilion** (one half to two thirds Merlot and the rest generally Cabernet Franc or CS) and **Pomerol** (usually contain more Merlot – up to $\frac{3}{4}$) (Chateau Petrus)

Also grown in South West France (notably Bergerac, Duras, Buzet, Cahors, Marmandais, Blaye, Bourg, Fronsac)

California : very popular with plantings increased 10 fold between 1985-2000. Washington state excellent location for Merlot.

Chile: previous Merlot turned out to be Carmenere grape but now this has been corrected. Now very individual due to the marked difference between the day and night temperatures.

Argentina : Mendoza region, different style – less acidity, more alcohol, often more tannin, little herbaceousness and sweet to smell and generous to taste.

South African: 'dry and lean'. Good wines vary enormously in style. Paarl, Stellenbosch probably best sources and stronger and more potent from the western Cape. **Franschoek Valley**

New Zealand – **Hawkes Bay**

Also:

Switzerland – Ticino

Italy – northeast Trentino, Veneto, Tuscany

Spain – northeast

Hungary

Bulgaria

References:

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Schuster M (2000) Essential Wine tasting: The complete practical wine tasting course. Mitchell Beazley

Forrest T (2003) The complete Wine Course. Carlton Books