



CHARDONNAY

History

This grape variety seems to have originated in the Burgundy area of Eastern France, although it was also found in early vineyards in the Champagne area of North-Eastern France.

The variety was first imported into Australia in the collection of James Busby in 1832, but it was only after its reintroduction into Australia in the 1950s that there was general acceptance of the variety, first of the wine produced in the warmer climatic regions and then of that coming from cool climate regions.

Characteristics

Vine

The vine produces quite vigorous growth with medium-sized, smooth, light green leaves which are not strongly lobed and it is early budding.

Fruit

The bunches are small to medium sized, winged, cylindrical and usually compact. The berry varies in size and shape, but is generally medium sized, round with a thin skin, amber-colored when exposed to the sun, but green in the shade.

Wine

In Australia Chardonnay has proved to be highly adaptable, growing well in warm irrigated regions or in cooler, often higher regions with a higher rainfall. The bouquet and palate therefore vary according to the growing conditions and the winemaking techniques used. Wine from the warmer irrigated regions, usually wood-treated, has a fruity bouquet of peaches and melon and a rich soft palate developing with age, whilst the wine from cooler regions will generally be more acidic, fresh and more delicate in its fruit palate. New plantings have increased significantly in these colder areas as the fresher style has become more popular. The Chardonnay from the latter regions is more often used in the production of sparkling white wines, the best of which are made utilizing the traditional French Méthode Champenoise techniques.

In France, Chardonnay is represented in the still, dry white wines of Burgundy, which are often golden in color, with a rich, fruity and long palate. The sparkling wine from Champagne

will usually present with a light color, high acidity and a toasty, apple fruit-flavored long palate. This style of wine is produced by the technique known as Méthode Champenoise and may vary in style from dry to semi-sweet and sweet with a small, fine, long-lasting bead. However many Champagnes are the result of blending Chardonnay with Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier and only those known as Blanc de Blancs are made only from Chardonnay.

Observations

In Australia Chardonnay is often blended with other varieties. Among the still white wines a Sémillon-Chardonnay blend has become popular. As in France and elsewhere, Chardonnay is widely used with Pinot Noir and other varieties in the production of sparkling white wines. While Chardonnay has been made traditionally in Australia with wood maturation, there is an increasing demand for unwooded Chardonnay as consumers have reacted to an overuse of oak.