



# STEPPING INTO THE SPOTLIGHT



## WINESTATE TURNS THE FOCUS ON EMERGING VARIETALS WITH ITS ANNUAL AWARDS.

### DAN TRAUCKI

YOU may recall that last year *Winestate* launched the Emerging Variety Awards (EVAs) sensationally with 399 entries into this exciting, consumer-focused wine competition. The EVAs specifically concentrate on wines made from the “emerging” grape varieties - those varieties that are outside the mainstream or “classic varieties”. Yet they are capable of producing exciting wines which are emerging to possibly become superstars in their own right sometime in the future. To put it into context, one must remember that in the latter part of the 1970s and into the 1980s chardonnay was an emerging grape variety in Australia, as was sauvignon blanc in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Most of the world’s wine (around 85 per cent) is made from the top 25 most popular grape varieties, yet as Jancis Robinson et al state in their book on grape varieties, *Wine Grapes*, there are 1168 different grape varieties used to make wine on planet earth. Some of which have up to 50 different names across the globe. In actual fact there are more varieties used than this, as I have tasted wines made from at least five different Chinese varieties which are not listed in their book.

The Australian wine industry is the most “experimental” on the planet as it makes wine from 154 grape varieties (and that figure is still rising) despite having only three native varieties (created by the CSIRO). Other than countries like Georgia and Greece with a plethora of indigenous varieties, most countries make their wine

from no more than 35 to 40 varieties. The global trend has been toward using less non-mainstream varieties, as many countries have jumped on, for example, the shiraz bandwagon, due to Australia’s success with this once almost forgotten (internationally) variety. If you went back 20 to 30 years, you would be hard pressed to find a syrah (the name given to shiraz by the old wine world) labelled wine from anywhere outside of Australia and New Zealand. Today, you can buy syrah from Chile, Argentina, Spain, Italy, France, the US and a raft of other countries. The same has been happening globally with chardonnay, cabernet, merlot and sauvignon blanc.

The Australian wine industry is busy swimming against that tide, with more new varieties being introduced each year. Only recently Clare Valley winery, Matriarch & Rogue, produced its first vintage of the Portuguese white variety fernaõ pira, and the deeply coloured Spanish red variety prieto picudo, which as far as I am aware are the first wines made from these varieties in Australia and probably the southern hemisphere. Tank samples of the first vintage of both of these wines were smashing and I am sure that over time as more wineries produce these excellent varieties, they will have a bright future on the Australian wine scene.

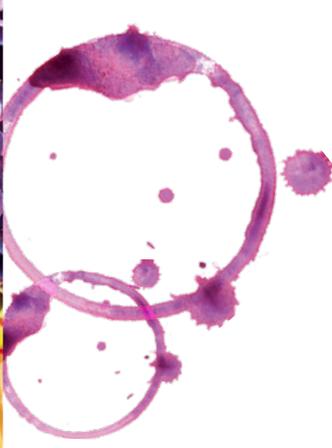
In Australia we do not think it is a big deal if the grower next door plants some rare or exotic grape variety, however, it is a big deal elsewhere in the wine world. In

most of the rest of the world, and certainly in Europe, it is illegal to plant grape varieties that have not been approved by either the government or the regional wine controlling body. Right now there is a big to-do in France because the growers of Bordeaux have been given approval by their government to add seven new varieties to the varieties that they are “permitted” to grow in the region. Great news. Except, it can only be these varieties and no others. So, if somebody planted shiraz in Bordeaux they would have their vines ripped out and they would be carted off to jail. Also, the new varieties cannot cover more than 10 per cent of the vineyard, nor can they (in total) exceed 10 per cent of the blend of the final wine. Wow, what a great step forward in fighting the effects of climate change to their region!

In keeping with Australia’s evolving vinous landscape, *Winestate* conducts the annual Emerging Variety Awards (EVAs).

The EVAs are very much a consumer-focused wine judging that aims to discover the best wines made from emerging grape varieties and to present them to wine consumers in a road show. This year the consumer tastings were conducted at the National Wine Centre in Adelaide, at the RACV Club in Melbourne and Sydney, with plans to add Brisbane and Perth in the future.

In the context of the EVAs, emerging varieties do not necessarily have to just be varieties that are recent arrivals, such as verdejo, vermentino or gruner veltliner



in white wines, and saperavi, lagrein or blaufrankisch in the reds. They can and should also include varieties that have been around for a long time but for some reason have not caught the attention of wine drinkers. Marsanne is a perfect example of this. Tahbilk has been growing marsanne since 1927 but is an emerging variety because the vast majority of Australian wine drinkers aren't aware of it. Likewise in the reds with durif, the flagship/hero variety of Rutherglen, where Morris Wines has been producing it as a straight varietal since 1954. Unfortunately it is still relatively unknown to the majority of Aussie wine drinkers, to the extent that over the last year I have met two South Australian winemakers who had never tasted a durif.

A few of these new emerging varieties are destined for greater visibility and greatness as they will really take-off like gruner veltliner (gruner) is currently doing. The first Australian gruner was made by Canberra's Lark Hill Wines in 2009, followed closely by Adelaide Hills-based Hahndorf Hill Wines the next year. Today there are 45 growers across the country, mainly in the Adelaide Hills, but also in the Queensland Granite Belt, the cooler parts of New South Wales and Victoria, as well as Tasmania. So from two growers to 45 in just nine years is explosive growth in the slow moving/ changing wine industry.

Most emerging varieties will never become superstars, they will just tick along without sudden explosive increases or even much gradual growth in plantings. Nonetheless, they will still be creating enjoyment for the small band of consumers who try and appreciate them, thereby helping to further the diversity of Australian grapes and wines.

The majority of these exciting new varietal wines are being made as a real "Aussie expression" of the variety from its land of origin, rather than as a "copycat" wine. In earlier days - 1960s to 1980s - when the Australian industry was changing from making predominantly

fortified wines to producing table wines, many producers tried to imitate the famous wines of Europe. This meant that many cabernet sauvignon growers were trying hard to imitate Bordeaux, while shiraz growers mimicked the grand wines of Hermitage in France, even to the extent of calling their shiraz wine hermitage. The few pinot growers that were in Australia at the time tried to imitate burgundy. As the industry has matured and outgrown those days it now produces Australian expressions of cabernet sauvignon, shiraz and pinot noir, etc.

This is also happening with these new emerging varieties. Yes, there are some that are being made in the "same old" methods used for cabernet and shiraz, but most producers are respecting the variety and treating it as it should be treated to derive the maximum from the variety, in a similar fashion to the way it is handled in its native land. In some cases the Australian expression of the variety is more consumer friendly when young - grapes ripen more in the increased sunshine and the resulting wines are not as acidic. This makes the wine more approachable as a youngster, which is more appropriate in these impatient days of "instant everything" where 85 per cent of wine is consumed within 48 hours of being purchased.

See page 88 for the complete EVAs results, however, here are some general observations from this year's event.

The variety with the most number of entries was tempranillo with 44 entries. It was divided into two classes - 2017 and 2018 vintages. Each produced a 5-star rated wine, with the La La Land Tempranillo in the 2017 class and the Billy Button The Alluring in the 2018. Interestingly, both wines came from Victoria.

In the sparkling wines, the top wine was a sparkling red, the Gapsted Wines Limited Release Sparkling Saperavi (again from Victoria), an exceptional wine that would make an old Georgian (native country) happy and proud.



The most successful class was gruner veltliner in which 13 out of the 16 entries scored three stars or better. Both the Centennial Vineyards 2018 Reserve Gruner Veltliner, from the NSW highlands and the 2018 K1 Wines Gruner Veltliner from the Adelaide Hills scoring five stars.

Another class that stood out was cabernet franc, which showed that winemakers are becoming more adept at handling this elegant variety, which is one of the parents of cabernet sauvignon; the other being sauvignon blanc, hence the progeny being called cabernet franc.

Malbec also stood out with seven out of the 10 entries being rated three stars or better.

Repeating last year's result, the sweet whites & fortified class was solid, with five out of eight entries being rated. The two top wines - petit manseng and marsanne - were both sweet whites.

Just as the Australian food palate has outgrown the old "meat and three veg" meals of the 1950s and gone on to encompass an array of amazing foods from all around the world, we are in the process of doing the same vinously, with just under 50 per cent of Australian wineries today producing at least one wine from emerging varieties.

Go out and try these new and exciting emerging wines and become involved in the Australian wine industry's emerging evolution. Out of this vast array of "new" wines you will find some that will really please your palate while enriching your drinking repertoire. 🍷

“THE AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY IS THE MOST ‘EXPERIMENTACIOUS’ ON THE PLANET AS IT MAKES WINE FROM 154 GRAPE VARIETIES (AND THAT FIGURE IS STILL RISING) DESPITE HAVING ONLY THREE NATIVE VARIETIES.”



ALBARINO ALVARINHO ARINHO  
 CHENIN BLANC ARNEIS CLAIR  
 CORTESE FIANO ASSYRTIKO A  
 VIOGNIER FRONTIGNAC FRIUL  
 GEWURZTRAMINER GRECO GR  
 VELTLINER MACABEO MARSAN  
 PETIT MANSENG PINOT BLANC  
 GRIGIO/GRIS ROUSSANNE SAV  
 SCHONBURGER VERDEJO VERD  
 VERDUZZO VERMENTINO VIOG  
 AGLIANICO BARBERA BLAUFRA  
 BLUE IMPERIAL CABERNET FR  
 CARMENÈRE CINSAUT DOLCET  
 DURIF GAMAY GRACIANO LAGR