

AN EMERGING WORLD



WITH THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE THE IMPORTANCE OF EMERGING VARIETIES CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.



DAN TRAUCKI

MANY wine drinkers are aware that there are over 1,200 different grape varieties used in the making of wine. What most aren't aware of is the fact that 85 per cent of the world's wine is made from only 35 varieties. Of course there are the "usual suspects" such as chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, etc., but at number three is, **Airen**, a ubiquitous Spanish white variety that used to be number one but luckily is falling down the rankings as it gets ripped out.

There are so many varieties that Australian wine drinkers have never heard of, three years ago Winestate introduced the EVAs (Emerging Variety Awards) making entries open to all non-mainstream varieties produced in Australia.

Many of the "Old World" wine countries have a raft of native varieties, for example Georgia (the birthplace of wine) has 525 different native varieties. Australia being so young and remote has no native varieties. However, we do have two varieties created by the CSIRO, **Tarrango** and **Taminga**, as well as two mutant varieties in **Red Semillon** and **White Cabernet** which mutated to have grapes which are the opposite colour to what they should be.

Being such a young wine country and thus free of the mass of regulations which smother creativity in the Old Wine World, Australian winemakers are free to experiment with any variety that takes their fancy. For instance right now there are a number of Greek native grape variety cuttings going through our strict quarantine process so that they can be

grown here, so that one day we could see Australian **Xinomavro**, **Malagousia**, **Mavrodafni** and so on, added to the list.

Right now, there are 156 different grape varieties being grown here, last year 154 and next year, who knows! So, once you take out all the "mainstream" varieties that you know of, there are still around 121 new "Emerging/Alternative" varieties grown.

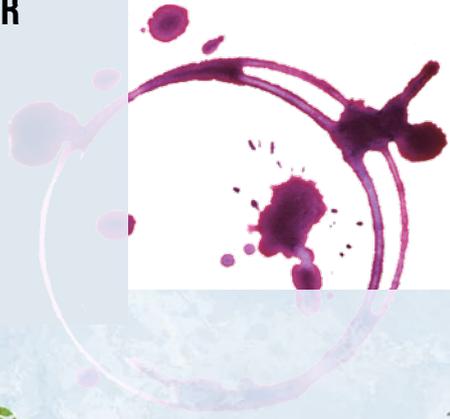
This must make us the most "experimentacious" wine country in the world, as very few countries experiment with varieties outside of the 'mainstream 35' and their own indigenous varieties. Whereas all the varieties that we experiment with are new to our country. This level of experimentation is on the rise as global warming begins to have a more significant impact on our climate and viticulture.

It is these varieties that the EVAs aim to attract so that they can be assessed and rated by the judging panel and then exposed to Aussie wine consumers so as to broaden their drinking horizons and help them find interesting new flavours with a lot more confidence in their purchases.

The focus on new emerging styles is on the Mediterranean varieties, from Italy, Spain, Portugal, with some interest on the French varieties such as **Viognier**, **Marsanne**, **Pinot Gris/Grigio** in the whites and **Durif**, **Mourvèdre** [AKA **Monastrell** (Spanish) or **Mataro** (Australian)], **Cabernet Franc** and **Petit Verdot** in the reds.

The popular Spanish red variety, **Tempranillo**, has just about become a "mainstream" variety here, as there are ▶

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now well over 400 wineries in Australia producing a tempranillo wine.

I believe that the following white varieties have a good chance of being adopted into the drinking habits of Aussie wine drinkers and possibly, eventually becoming part of the mainstream. In no particular order these are: **Albariño, Vermentino, Fiano, Verdejo, Arinto** and **Petit Manseng**, with **Picpoul** possibly becoming the go-to wine for oysters. The varieties of Fiano and Vermentino are well on the way to establishing themselves, whilst the Austrian super-star, **Grüner Veltliner**, is skyrocketing up the charts, having gone from two producers a decade ago, to over fifty producers today – a meteoric rise. The other varieties mentioned are rising much more gradually.

As far as the reds are concerned, there are two separate directions being followed. The main one being the adoption of the Mediterranean varieties from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) and Italy, with the others embracing big, rich, powerful wines from wherever they come from.

In the Mediterranean reds, Tempranillo leads the charge followed by **Garnacha** (Grenache) then a long way back by **Graciano**, Monastrell (Mataro or Mourvèdre) and **Touriga Nacional**.

The Italian charge is well and truly being led by Sangiovese with 303 producers with **Lagrein, Montepulciano, Nebbiolo, Aglianico, Barbera** and **Nero d'Avola** following well behind the flagship **Sangiovese**. Most of these varieties are being grown in the warmer areas making them a bit richer, less acidic and more approachable than their Italian counterparts, which makes them ideal for these “instant times” of less patience and earlier consumption. They are becoming quite popular with everyday wine drinkers.

In the ‘Big’ wine category the varieties making the most impact/ground are – Durif, **Tannat, Saperavi** and **Zinfandel**. There are some exceptional wines being made from these varieties and in fact an Australian

Saperavi won the first ever “SapPrize Award” in 2017 run by Georgia, to identify the best “Non-Georgian” Saperavi in the world. Not only did an Australian wine win the top trophy, but four out of the five gold medal winners came from Australia.

These days Australia is turning out some sensational Zinfandels, which can match all but the very best American wines (like Ridge Vineyards) from this big, bold variety. My favourite of the big wines is durif, of which Rutherglen is its spiritual homeland these days, however it produces cracking wines wherever it is grown.

Finally, there are a couple of French varieties that are well worth mentioning, Cabernet Franc and **Malbec (Cot)**. Cabernet Franc has always lived in the shadow of cabernet sauvignon but is an excellent variety as it produces beautifully aromatic, slightly lighter wines than its big brother, which again makes them eminently suitable in today's marketplace. Malbec struggled here until the turn of the century, however since then there are a growing number of “world-class” malbec being produced here. Incidentally, this year we have seen the first Australian vintage of the Portuguese white variety **Fernao Pires** and the Spanish red variety **Prieto Picudo**, both from the Riverland.

The importance of emerging varieties cannot be underestimated, as global warming continues affecting the ability of regions to produce wines from the “traditional” varieties. For Australia to maintain a viable and ecologically sound wine industry into the next century, we need to adapt the varieties we grow to those best suited to the encroaching climate conditions. This is where the Mediterranean varieties will shine, with their heat and drought tolerance.

So, I would like to suggest that you tempt/tease your palate with a few of these emerging variety wines. You may encounter the occasional one that is not to your liking, but the vast majority will be fabulous wines that broaden your drinking horizons. *Cheers!*