

THE RARE FACTOR

The last instalment in our look at extremely rare grape varieties. WORDS DAN TRAUCKI

RED SEMILLON

A mutation of Semillon, which occurred in South Africa a few hundred years ago. It has not taken off and there are only a few hectares of it in South Africa and the Adelaide Hills. Top Note Adelaide Hills Red/The Noble Rose 2017 has a botrytis nose with citrus peel, dried apricots and a superb, sweet, rich palate with lashings of apricot.

REFOSCO

This is actually a family of Italian native varieties. The specific one that we call Refosco is officially named *Refosco dal Peduncolo Rosso*. Refosco is grown mainly around Friuli, Gavi and Trentino and makes deeply coloured, medium-bodied reds. As it has rich tannins it is best suited to accompany food, however as it ages it develops lovely floral characters and the tannins soften off. One of the two Australian producers, Bike & Barrel Wines in Alpine Valley in Victoria, sent three consecutive vintages of their Refosco (2015, 2016 and 2017). All three have a great depth of vibrant colour and a big rich palate with stacks of flavours. The 2017 has strong, almost aggressive tannins, whereas in the 2016 they have started to soften, making it a great wine for rich food. The 2015 current release has mellowed out spectacularly so that while the tannins are still large, they are now smooth, making this wine enjoyable with light to medium richness food.

RONDINELLA

An Italian native red variety grown almost exclusively in the Veneto region of northern Italy, where there are almost 2,500 hectares planted. It is used in the wines of the Bardolino and Valpolicella regions. It is also added to Corvina and other varieties as it is a prolific grower but is somewhat neutral unless given TLC. So far Freeman Wines in Sunraysia are the only growers of this variety in Australia. Freeman Hilltops NSW Rondo-Rosé (Rondinella) 2019 has a lovely salmon pink colour, rose petal and floral aromas on the complex bouquet and a crisp, refreshing palate. Freeman Hilltops NSW Secco Rondinella/Corvina 2014 is a classic Valpolicella blend made in the Amarone style using partially dried grapes and matured longer before

release. Resplendent aromas of dark cherries and liquorice with a hint of tobacco. Complex flavours with a hint of fruit sweetness on the front palate and a drying, lingering finish.

ST MACAIRE

This native French variety almost vanished. Named after a village in Bordeaux, until phylloxera struck France it was one of about 30 red grape varieties used in the 'claret' of Bordeaux. Today the only known plantings are a small patch in California and in the Riverina in NSW, where the only two producers are Calabria and Old Man's Block – both of whom produce varietal wines. Old Man's Block Riverina St Macaire 2013 and 2014 are both massively deep in colour and have big, fruit-driven bouquets and big, tight, grippy palates. The 2013 is a smidge smoother and less tannic due to extra age. Great wines that are just a smidge rustic and lacking in finesse – a liquid steak in every glass and eminently desirable if you like your wines big. Calabria Riverina St Macaire 2015 is the third or fourth vintage of this wine I have tasted and it keeps getting more refined and polished. Deep, dark, dense colour with oak and complex fruit on the bouquet. A big, silky-smooth, unctuous palate with lashings of great flavour and a drying, lingering finish. brilliant.

SCHEUREBE

A German-created white variety generated by Dr Georg Schue in 1916. One of its parents is Riesling; the other is a mystery. A highly aromatic variety that originally was used to produce sweet wines, but more recently has been making excellent full-bodied, dry white wines when given enough TLC. About 1,500 hectares are planted in Germany. In Austria, there are only a few hundred hectares where it is used as a component in some of the Trockenbeerenauslese sweet wines, in the Neusiedlersee region. There is also some Scheurebe grown in Switzerland, California, Oregon and in Canada's 'new' wine region of Nova Scotia, as well as in Margaret River. Wills Domain Margaret River Cuvee D'Elevage Blanc de Blanc is a sophisticated sparkling with complex aromas of citrus, passionfruit, fresh grass and pineapple. It has light and bright lemons on the front palate and pineapple and passionfruit on the superb

finish. Wills Domain Margaret River Scheurebe Block 9 2016 has mature Riesling-style aromas on the bouquet. It is smooth and well-rounded.

SCHONBURGER

A white variety created in Germany in the 1970s by crossing Pinot Noir with a Chasselas-Muscat-of-Hamburg cross. Mainly grown in Germany due to its resistance to the cold, it is also found in England, British Columbia, Washington State and Oregon. Australia has three growers, all in Tasmania. Barringwood Scintilla Schönburger Sekt 2018 has big aromas similar to but lighter than those of a Gewürztraminer with a hint of yeast autolysis. A light, lively, bright palate. Barringwood Schönburger 2018 has floral and citrus blossoms on the bouquet and a smooth, soft, elegant palate full of interesting flavours and tight acidity. Bream Creek Schönburger 2019 is bright and fresh with lively fruit aromas. The palate is somewhat similar to a lighter style Moscato with tight acidity on the finish. Bream Creek Late Picked Schönburger 2018 has big varietal, perfumed aromas with a splash of dried apricots and orange peel. A gorgeous sweet, smooth palate. Elegant and sophisticated.

VILLARD BLANC

A French bred hybrid white variety which by the late 1960s was the third-most planted white variety in France due to its mould resistance. Since 1977 it has been illegal to plant it in France. It is still grown in eastern USA where the climate presents a considerable mould problem. The variety is fairly neutral and usually makes bland wines. However, when harvested late, it can produce delightful dessert wines. In Australia only Raleigh Wines make this wine. Raleigh Wines Coffs Harbour Late Harvest Villard Blanc has a Semillon-like bouquet with added pears and spice. It is light and bright like a spatlese wine with divinely elegant, sweet flavours and a superb finish.

ZWEIGELT

The most planted red variety in its native Austria, it was created in 1922 by the crossing of two other native red varieties, Blaufränkisch and Saint Laurent. It is similar to Pinot Noir but has greater depth of colour and is aimed at early consumption. It has been planted in Canada, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and most recently in Belgium and the UK. In Australia there are two producers and Hahndorf Hill was the pioneer. Hahndorf Hill Adelaide Hills Zsa Zsa Zweigelt 2019 has a perfumed bouquet with cassis, spice and just a hint of camphor. A delicious, lively mouthful of raspberries and cherries with a nice, tight, slightly acidic finish. Food friendly. ♦