

Pinotage



By Peter Dry, Emeritus Fellow, The Australian Wine Research Institute **AWRI**

BACKGROUND

Pinotage (PEE-no-targe) was bred at Stellenbosch in South Africa in 1925 by Professor Abraham Perold. It was said to be a cross of Pinot Noir (male parent) by 'Hermitage' (female parent)—at that time in South Africa, Cinsaut was known as 'Hermitage'. This parentage was confirmed by DNA analysis in 2007. The first commercial planting was made in South Africa in the early 1940s, but the name did not appear on a wine label until 1961. The global area (2010) is 6404ha, of which 98% is in South Africa where the largest areas are in Malmesbury, Stellenbosch and Paarl. There are small areas in California (mainly San Joaquin Valley), Brazil, New Zealand, Oregon, Washington and British Columbia. There are at least seven wine producers in Australia (New England, Granite Belt, Riverland, Alpine Valleys, Yarra Valley, Geographe).

VITICULTURE

Budburst is early to mid-season and maturity is early. Vigour is moderate with an erect growth habit. Bunches are medium and compact with small thick-skinned berries. Yield is

moderate. Pinotage is known as a hardy, easy-to-grow variety in South Africa with moderate susceptibility to fungal diseases. It can be spur pruned.

WINE

Pinotage can produce well-coloured, firm and spicy wines. Descriptors include dark fruits, smoky and earthy. However, wines may have an unpleasant 'spray paint' aroma, a consequence of high isoamyl acetate concentration due to excessive water stress or high temperature in the vineyard. Pinotage is often blended (it is a required component in 'Cape Blends'). It is also used for fortified styles. The reputation of Pinotage amongst winemakers within South Africa varies considerably, from those who favour it for various reasons, to those who believe that it has no place at all.

For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (marcel.essling@awri.com.au; tel. 08 8303 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Alternative Varieties Research to Practice program in your region.