

SAGRANTINO

By Peter Dry

Viticulture Consultant

The Australian Wine Research Institute



BACKGROUND

Sagrantino (SAH-grahn-TEE-noh) is a very minor variety in Italy that was rescued from extinction in the 1960s. It is grown in a very small area, around Perugia (Umbria), to produce Montefalco Sagrantino (granted DOCG status in 1992). There were just 360ha in Italy in 2000. Sagrantino has been known since the late 19th century in Montefalco but does not appear to have spread elsewhere in Italy. The fact that it has very few synonyms (Sagrantino di Montefalco, Sagrantino Rosso) is perhaps indicative of its restricted range in Europe. It is said to have been introduced from Greece in the Middle Ages—but there is no DNA data yet to support this proposition. Historically it was used to produce a sweet wine from partially-dried grapes. Today Sangrantino is most likely to be used for varietal red wine—but may be blended with Sangiovese in Montefalco and surrounding communes. It was imported to Australia by Chalmers Nursery in 1998, and is now grown in many regions including Murray Darling, Swan Hill, Heathcote, King Valley, McLaren Vale, Eden Valley and the Granite Belt. There are now more than 14 wine producers. There is also a small area in California.

VITICULTURE

Budburst is mid-season and ripening is mid to late (about one week later than Shiraz at Swan Hill). Bunches are small to medium, loose to well-filled (with some clonal variation for the latter). Berries are medium, dark-blue or black with thick skin. Vigour is low and growth habit is semi-erect. Yield is said to be low and variable in Italy but moderate yields can be achieved with irrigation in Australia. It is adapted to a hot, dry climate and has stood up very well to heatwaves in inland regions in Australia. It also has good tolerance of spring frosts. Bud fertility is good and spur pruning is most common. Harvest can be fully mechanised but low shaker speed is required because canes are brittle. It has moderate tolerance of powdery mildew and Botrytis, but not downy mildew.

WINE

Very high juice polyphenolics results in wines with good structure, high in colour and tannins. Wines are fruity with a good body and acidity and delicately perfumed. Descriptors include forest fruits, cherries, mulberries, violets and vanilla. Ageing potential is very good. Long maceration, e.g. four to five weeks, with gentle cap management may be used in Italy.

This is an extract from the manual developed for the Research to Practice on 'Alternative varieties: emerging options for a changing environment' (Tassie, L., Dry, P.R. and Essling, M. 2010). For further information on this and other emerging varieties, contact Marcel Essling (rtp@awri.com.au; tel. 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of this Research to Practice program in your region.