

FURMINT

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AWRI

BACKGROUND

Furmint (pronounced fir-MINT) is the main variety of the legendary Tokaji Aszú (Tokay) wines of the Tokaj-Helyalja region of eastern Hungary. Tokay was first made in 1650 and is said to be the first wine made from botrytised grapes, possibly two hundred years before Sauternes. It is also used for dry wine. There are about 4000ha of Furmint in Hungary, almost all of it planted in Tokaj. Furmint might have originally come from Austria as long ago as the 13th century where it has been a minor variety ever since—but now undergoing a modest revival. It is more important in both Slovenia and Croatia (where it is known as Moslavac or Šipon) and also grown in the Crimea (Ukraine), possibly in Albania and in South Africa. It has been shown by DNA profiling to be a half-sibling of many other varieties including Chardonnay and Riesling. There are more than 100 synonyms listed in the Vitis International Variety Catalogue. Furmint was probably introduced to Australia by James Busby in the 1830s and has been found as odd vines in plantings of other varieties in Victoria. There were three wine producers listed in the *2012 Australian and New Zealand Wine Industry Directory* (published by Winetitles www.winebiz.com.au).

VITICULTURE

Budburst is early to midseason and maturity is mid-season to late. Growth habit is very erect and vigour is moderate to high. Bunches are small to medium, loose to well-filled with medium berries with thin skin. Yield is generally low (said to be due to poor fruitset). It can be spur-pruned. In Hungary it is said to require warm sites with well-drained soils. There are conflicting reports on its susceptibility to fungal diseases: for example, susceptibility to powdery mildew is low to high. Most reports suggest low tolerance of botrytis, not surprising given that it is used for Tokay where the botrytised (aszú) grapes hang on the vine until as late as November, shrivelling and retaining high acid levels.

WINE

For the wines of Tokaj, Furmint is used together with the more aromatic variety Hárslevelu—the best wines are fresh and luscious with medium alcohol (around 12%), good acidity, richness and lingering flavours of quince, dried fruits, marmalade, toffee and honey. When used for dry wines, Furmint can be intense with good acidity: common descriptors include citrus, pear and stonefruits. Dry wines from several countries have attracted favourable comments in recent times. It has been said to combine the pungent aromatics of Sauvignon Blanc, the richness and oak-friendliness of Chardonnay and the minerality and acidity of Riesling.

This is based on 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 (marcel.essling@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.