

PINOT BLANC



AWRI

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

BACKGROUND

Until the end of the 19th century, Pinot Blanc (PEE-no BLONK) was often confused with Chardonnay—therefore any mention of Pinot Blanc prior to that time is unreliable. Like Pinot Gris, it is a colour mutant of Pinot Noir. Synonyms include Clevner, Klavner (Alsace), Weisser Burgunder (Germany) and Pinot Bianco (Italy). The global area planted (2010) was 14,742ha (Germany has 26%, Italy 21%, Austria 13%). There are also significant areas in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Moldova. The area in France increased to 1565ha at the end of the 1980s but has since declined slowly to approximately 1300ha in 2010. In France, there is little grown outside Alsace, where it is regarded as a workhorse variety, and less regarded than Pinot Gris. In Italy it is used for dry white wine, mainly in the north east. In Germany the largest areas are in Baden, Pfalz and Rheinhessen. In Austria it is often blended with Welschriesling and used for both dry and sweet wines. In California, Pinot Blanc is not as popular as Pinot Gris, but it is widely planted, used for both still and sparkling wines. It is also grown in Oregon and British Columbia. The first commercial planting of Pinot Blanc in Australia may have been in the Yarra Valley in 1997. There are now at least 17 wine

producers in Australia (Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia).

VITICULTURE

Budburst and maturity are early. Vigour is moderate to high with semi-erect growth habit. Bunches are small to medium and compact with small berries. Yield is moderate (higher than Pinot Gris). Spur pruning is used in Australia. In both France and Australia, susceptibility to botrytis bunch rot is higher than average. There is clonal variation for both bunch size and compactness and susceptibility to bunch rot.

WINE

Wines of Pinot Blanc have moderate structure, similar to Pinot Gris but with more freshness and delicacy. They may also have higher acidity than Pinot Gris. Descriptors include apple, pear and white flowers. In Alsace, wines labelled as 'Pinot Blanc' are often blends with Riesling, Sylvaner or Auxerrois. Pinot Blanc may also be used in sparkling wines such as Cremant d'Alsace.

For further information on this and other emerging varieties contact Marcel Essling (marcel.essling@awri.com.au or 08 8313 6600) at The Australian Wine Research Institute to arrange the presentation of the Alternative Varieties Research to Practice program in your region.