

# The bleeding truth about saignée — the Australian experience



What has been motivating winemakers in Australia to use the saignée method of draining off juice shortly after crushing, how has this compared with their actual experiences, and what have they learned along the way? **Sonya Logan** presents a snapshot of views from five Australian winemakers.

Meaning ‘to bleed’ in French, saignée (*sohn-yay*) is the name given to the process of draining off a portion of crushed juice after a short maceration on skins to increase the concentration of mostly red wines. In the case of red grapes, the drained juice can then be used to make rosé.

In 2012, the then president of the Provence Wine Council, François Millo, was critical of rosés made using saignée, describing them as “not true rosé”.

“People who make saignée rosé are opportunists. In their mind they are making red wine — the rosé just happens to be a by-product,” Millo told *the drinks business*. “The saignée method is a bad way of making rosé. The wine is more of an afterthought, very few people in

Provence use it...our grapes are grown for rosé and our harvest is done for rosé.”

While saignée has the dual ability to not only produce a rosé from the free-run from barely-crushed grapes prior to fermentation but concentrate red wine, thus increasing the proportion of phenolics and flavours in the remaining juice, achieving these two outcomes simultaneously with a satisfactory result is not as easy as it sounds.

Brendon Keys, winemaker for BK Wines, based in South Australia’s Adelaide Hills, was introduced to saignée while working at a winery in the United States in the mid-2000s.

“We used to do it to all the [red] wines there,” says Keys. “All the Cabernets, all the Pinots, Merlots, Syrah, everything.”

# Free SO<sub>2</sub> is just the beginning.



**As world leaders in biosensor technology, our reputation is built on precision.**

That's why you can trust the Sentaia™ hand-held wine analyzer to accurately measure free SO<sub>2</sub> levels in your post-fermentation wine. No sample preparation. No reagent preparation. No calibration. No special training required. Just reliable test results in less than a minute, wherever and whenever you need them. And with more key wine analysis tests on the way, free SO<sub>2</sub> is just the beginning. The Sentaia™ hand-held wine analyzer is available now through Grapeworks.

**THE POWER OF A LAB  
IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.**



Contact 03 9555 5500 for further information  
or email: [sentia@grapeworks.com.au](mailto:sentia@grapeworks.com.au)

**grapeworks**  
CONSUMABLES





**Above:** Witches Falls assistant winemaker Lauren Smith.  
**Below:** BK Wines winemaker Brendon Keys.

Keys says the widespread use of saignée at the winery was attributed to the height of the influence of wine critic Robert Parker's penchant for powerful wines.

"Everybody was trying to make these super tight, super concentrated wines.

And the juice was just thrown away," he recalls.

Keys decided to try his hand at saignée on some Pinot Noir in 2012.

### Producing 'two wines'

"In bigger vintages, with bigger crops, it's a great opportunity to concentrate juice. And, because we pick our Pinot so early, we can make a really pretty rosé from the saignée, giving us two wines."

Keys continued to use saignée to produce both wines up until 2015, but admits that in retrospect the effect on those Pinots was barely noticeable, but the practice at least "gave us a nice, pretty rosé that people seemed to like".

Referring specifically to the Pinot: "From what I've learned over the years you need to [bleed off] a minimum of 15-20% to show proper results in the finished wine; 5% or 10% doesn't really do anything."

While BK Wines stopped making a saignée rosé in 2016 — "just because I felt like I'd lost interest in that wine" ►





# FROST PROTECTION

No Hype or Misleading Advertising.  
At Orchard-Rite, we Stand on Facts.

**Over 35,000 Frost Fans SOLD Worldwide!**

## In Australia

The First Frost Fan Installed in 1994

## In New Zealand

The First Frost Fan Installed in 1978,  
Still in Operation

Independently Tested, 3rd Party Peer  
Reviewed and Meets Council Requirments

49 dB at 300 Metres

55 dB at 150 Metres

Lowest Fuel Consumption

Highest Volume of Airflow

Highest Amount of Thrust

Highest Level of Wind Momentum

= The Best Protection in the Industry!

A tall, silver, cylindrical Frost Fan stands prominently in a vineyard. It has three white blades with yellow tips. The fan is positioned in front of a dense line of green trees, with a mountain range visible in the background under a clear blue sky. The base of the fan is surrounded by a wooden fence and more vineyard rows.

**Orchard-Rite**

Pure Power. Pure Performance. Pure Orchard-Rite.



Darren Pulford: 0417 929 487  
In Bunbury Western Australia



Andrew Jolley (AJ): 0428 839 128  
In Mildura Victoria



Darren Graetz: 08 8522 2188  
In Gawler South Australia





Box Grove Vineyard's Sarah Gough.

— a wine using the same technique is set to return to the BK Wines portfolio.

“We’re about to release a wine called Saignee out of 2021. I’ve changed a few things. I want it to be more like a light red, less like a Provence style rosé. The thing that makes the difference as far as I’m concerned is whether you [run off the juice on] day one, day two or day five because the colour pick up is so much more and the yeast is more active [the longer you wait]. Previously, I was running off on day one, maybe on the second day.

“I hadn’t done [a saignée wine] for a while so I thought I’d do it again and try it this year. And I’m pretty happy with the wine; I think it looks awesome. I don’t notice [the effect of saignée] when I’m tasting Pinot barrels because they’re all treated the same, so I haven’t got something to compare them with, but my main goal is a slightly denser palate.

We all know Pinot can be quite one dimensional, so it’s just another tool to create structure and complexity without adding anything.”

Keys warns fellow winemakers to “not be scared to go to 20%” when it comes to achieving noticeable results in red wine.

“Because I’ve had experience with [saignée] I know what I can look forward to. But if I was doing it for the first time, I’d have two ferments and do one with saignée and one without it. Do the saignée at 20% and then follow that through to see if you get the result you’re trying to achieve. But we’re definitely getting the result we want to achieve and we’re getting the lighter red as a secondary product to sell.

Winemaker Nick Glaetzer trialled saignée in the mid-2000s while working at Tasmania’s Frogmore Creek before establishing his own Tassie-based

wine company, Glaetzer-Dixon Family Winemakers, in 2008. The impetus came from wanting to enhance Pinot Noir, particularly from young vineyards. Encouragement also came from Bob Dambergs who was leading investigations by the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) into the influence of maceration techniques on the phenolic compounds of Pinot Noir. Dambergs provided Glaetzer with guidance on using saignée, the result being the creation of “a nice layer” as a component of a blend.

“Initially we removed 5-8% of juice post crushing which was then directed to rosé. In later years, Bob Dambergs suggested we reserve this juice in the cool room and reincorporate it to the must at the end of ferment. This treatment was nicknamed ‘Bob’s Saignée’, and had some very good results,” explains Glaetzer.

“Bob’s Saignée method’ effectively increased seed tannin extraction, similar to extended post ferment maceration.”

Deeper colour, heavier red fruits, less floral characters and a firmer structure also resulted.

Glaetzer said he’s not utilising saignée currently because he’s “working with much older, lower cropping vineyards”. But he maintains that for young and/or commercial higher-yielding vineyards, ‘Bob’s Saignée’ is “a very good tool for enhancing tannin structure without losing volume”.

“In our Frogmore trials these wines outperformed enzyme and expensive tannin additions,” he adds.

And his advice to other winemakers who might be keen to use saignée?

“My only advice would be to experiment. Each vineyard is different as is each vintage.” ▶

# WINEQUIP



## PULEO PREXA PNEUMATIC PRESSES

PULEO Pneumatic Presses are designed for the soft pressing of grapes, and the extraction of high quality must.

- Italian designed and built stainless-steel construction
- Lateral membrane made of food grade PVC or polyurethane (optional)
- 12 press sizes ranging from 800L to 35,000L
- Closed, drain and inert (nitrogen) options
- Easy to clean and operate with PLC touch screen, and remote option
- 12 customisable programs with 2 in built crémant cycles
- Australia wide service team



## PULEO VEGA DESTEMMER

- Gentle on grape berries, effective on all MOG removal
- Options from 7-120t/hour, with potentiometer
- Gentle and highly customisable with removable crusher rollers or screw feed hopper
- Additional cage sizes with holes from 18mm to 30mm in stainless steel or polyethylene option
- Easy to clean and maintain

**PULEO**  
LEADING WINERY MANUFACTURER.

[WWW.WINEQUIP.COM.AU](http://WWW.WINEQUIP.COM.AU)



Victoria  
South Australia  
New South Wales  
Western Australia  
Tasmania  
New Zealand

59 Banbury Road, Reservoir  
16 Burdon Street, Dudley Park  
2/40 Bradmill Avenue, Rutherford  
Unit 5, 1 Ostler Drive, Vasse  
Lot 9, Swanston Park Drive, Waverley  
3 Estuary Place, Richmond, Nelson

03 9462 4777  
08 8365 0044  
02 4932 4511  
08 9755 4433  
03 6722 5050  
+64 0800 699 599

Email us at [sales@winequip.com.au](mailto:sales@winequip.com.au)



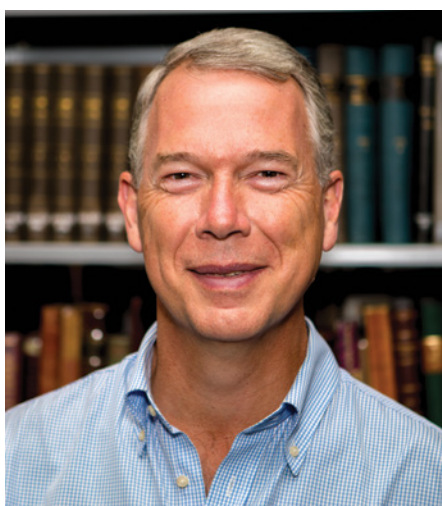


Back across the Bass Strait in Tahbilk, in central Victoria, vigneron Sarah Gough has trialled but has subsequently set aside saignée to make rosé. Initially drawn to making the Rhône varieties Shiraz, Roussanne and Viognier for her Box Grove Vineyard label, she has since added the Italians Prosecco, Vermentino and Primitivo to her portfolio, and it is the latter to which she has applied saignée.

An increasing attraction among the drinking public to Provence-style rosés has seen Gough abandon saignée for rosé.

“[Saignée on Primitivo] made a very dark coloured wine because it was picked riper. The market now wants just a whisper of colour — they want the Provence styles. So, it became a style that was quite hard work to sell in the end so financially just wasn’t worth us pursuing it.

“From one parcel of fruit we could make a rich red and a rosé but then we worked out that to make a lighter colour rosé from that fruit — even though it had beautiful flavours of rose petals and Turkish delight and quite a nice spice — it had to be picked at quite a marked difference in brightness to what we needed for the dry red. Even then we were also drying the fruit in an Amarone-style process to make the dry red richer and more chocolatey.



**Top: Nick Glaetzer of Glaetzer-Dixon Family Winemakers. Above: Peter Godden.**

“We were picking [the Primitivo] at 14.5 Baume and that’s too ripe for rosé. If we want rosé at 11-12.5 Baume, the skins aren’t any use to a dry red.”

Because of this disparity, Gough suggests that if using saignée to improve the quality of a dry red, making a lighter red from the drained juice is preferable over a rosé.

“It’s good to be able to make use of all the various bits and pieces if you can,” she says of the ability to utilise the by-product of saignée.

Despite a strong following among its cellar door customers, Witches Falls, in Queensland’s Gold Coast Hinterland, has also wound back its use of saignée.

“We have a lot of customers here that still come in for the saignée so I don’t think that it would ever totally be off the menu here,” says Lauren Smith, Witches Falls assistant winemaker. But, like Gough, Smith says lighter-style rosés are what the market currently wants.

Witches Falls first began experimenting with saignée in 2006 using Cabernet. Owner and chief winemaker Jon Heslop had seen the technique applied while in France and decided to introduce it at his own winery to produce another offering at the cellar door, where the bulk of the winery sells its wine. Having a saignée rosé on offer presented the opportunity to embark on a new conversation with its customers.

“The saignée rosé basically just allowed us to present something else to our customers initially,” Smith says.

Aiming to ultimately enhance the quality of the winery’s Cabernet as well as produce a rosé, Smith says the results were “unexpected”, especially for the dry red.

“Although the rosé that came from that Cab Sauv went really well, the Cab Sauv was not so great; it was too tannic, too concentrated and imbalanced. I’m not sure of the exact percentage that was drained off but it was around 20%.”

Buoyed by the taste and popularity of the rosé at the cellar door, the focus of the application of saignée at Witches Falls shifted primarily to rosé.

“Because the rosé went really well, that became a lot more of the primary focus instead of bettering the quality of a red. So we backed off the percentage so that the red didn’t deteriorate. And then we slowly moved towards just making the saignée rosé instead of a red wine too.”

### Trialling varieties

While initially experimenting with Cabernet Sauvignon, Witches Falls moved on to trialling other varieties as well, first Grenache, then Shiraz and Black Muscat.

“Cabernet is a really big, tannic, gutsy wine. The variety is probably not as

suited. Moving to Grenache and Black Muscat would have been a better choice.”

With the recent growth in demand for lighter-style rosés, Witches Falls has scaled down its production of saignée rosé in favour of growing grapes for rosé production at the outset.

“Rosé is going through a wonderful peak at the moment so we’re actually now steering away from the saignée process totally and just making traditional rosé.

“With saignée, timing is absolute key; any extended contact and you’ve just got the wrong colour. So it’s much easier to make a rosé in the traditional way instead of doing it from saignée where you can bleed a lot more colour.

“I think the challenge that presents itself with saignée is that you’re harvesting a grape that’s at red wine maturity — so you’ve got high sugar, you’ve got higher alcohol, and that’s not necessarily what you want for a day-drinking rosé or watching-the-sunset rosé.”

While Witches Falls may have moved away from saignée, they haven’t ruled out returning to it.

“If the grapes present themselves in the right way to be made into a saignée without hurting the red wine, then I think it might be a nice option. But I think it’s a very delicate balance to strike so that you get two good wines from it. I think it can take away from a good red wine and make it a bit too undesirable,” Smith says, adding that vigneron would be better off concentrating their effort elsewhere to produce a desirable red.

“We’re pretty lucky in that the grapes that we get are wonderful. That comes down to management in the vineyard and things like that. So if you’ve got good growing, then you don’t have to focus as much on bettering the quality when you’ve already got a good wine.”

Peter Godden, known to most through his work at the Australian Wine Research Institute, made wine for several years from the mid-2000s under his own label, Arrivo. Although he hasn’t made wine for about 10 years, Godden reports good results from using saignée on Nebbiolo, which was the focus of his Arrivo label.

He said that although most of the winemakers applying saignée in Australia would be using the drained-off juice to make rosé or, possibly, blend into white wines, like Glaetzer, he sees merit in blending some of it back into the original juice from which it came, à la the ‘Bob’s Saignée method’.

“I would drain off at the start, and then add some of it back to my Nebbiolo ferments as they slowed and cooled, until I was satisfied with the wine,” Godden explains.

“The first year I did it (2007) I fermented out the balance that I didn’t blend back and it was pretty good rosé (Arrivo Nebbiolo Rosato), so I bottled it. It got a lot of good press, so I did it every year from then on with the balance that I didn’t want to blend back to the other Nebbiolo – which remained the major driver of volume.”

**GW**

# SnapMax Vineguards.

## Ask for them by name!



- SnapMax. Pre-assembled, just press open to install!
- Translucent for drive-by vine inspection.
- Greater vine length growth.
- Micro ventilation for vine health.
- Available in multiple lengths.
- Add the Dripper wire hook for extra security on windy sites.
- Add the WeedMat for moisture retention and weed suppression.

**AND NOW with an extra 50mm length for ground-wire height variation.**

**A perfect fit every time!**

**Call our Sales Team on 03 9555 5500 or contact [info@globalgreen.com.au](mailto:info@globalgreen.com.au) for more information.**

**Globalgreen**  
environmental

[globalgreen.com.au](http://globalgreen.com.au)