

Aligoté

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



GENERAL

Aligoté (*ahlee-GOHT-ay*) is an old variety originating in north-east France, possibly Burgundy. DNA analysis has revealed that it is the offspring of Pinot Noir and Gouais Blanc, and thus a sibling of Chardonnay, Gamay Noir, Melon and several other varieties from north-east France.

Aligoté is largely restricted to Burgundy and nearby. The area in France (1925ha in 2010) has remained relatively constant since the mid-20th century. In Burgundy, it is one of the two permitted white varieties — the other, of course, being Chardonnay. In the Cote d'Or department, it makes up 7% of the total planted area, compared with 22% for Chardonnay and 68% for Pinot Noir.

Chardonnay and Pinot Noir dominate the best sites — consequently Aligoté wines tend to be acidic and neutral. The two main appellations are Bourgogne Aligoté and Aligoté Bouzeron. Synonyms include: Aligotte, Carcairone (Italy), Chaudenet Gras, Giboulot, Griset Blanc, Mahranauli (Moldova), Plant de Trois, Plant Gris, Troyen Blanc and Vert Blanc. The global area was 36,119 ha in 2010 (down 34% since 1990).

The largest areas are found in eastern Europe: Moldova, where it is the most important variety, has the largest area (44% of global), followed by Ukraine (26%),

Romania (20%) and Russia. There are also small areas in Switzerland, USA and Canada. Although Aligoté has been in Australia since the 1960s, there are just a handful of wine producers.

VITICULTURE

Budburst and maturity are early. Vigour is moderate. Bunches are small and loose to well-filled with small berries. Yield is low to moderate but variable, partly a consequence of its susceptibility to millerandage. It can be pruned both short and long. It is said to be more susceptible to bunch rot and downy mildew than average. There are at least eight clones registered in France with variation in vigour, yield and wine quality.

WINE

One of the notable characteristics of Aligoté is its high acidity — this is one reason why it is used for sparkling wine in both eastern Europe and in France (e.g. Crémant de Bourgogne). The best table wines can have varietal character and crispness with similar structure to Chardonnay. Descriptors include apple and lemon. Wines are best consumed when young.

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

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