

WINE Talk: August 2014

The newsletter of Living Wines: Edition 48

As this newsletter goes out we are heading to France for our annual visit to the vineyards of our suppliers. This year we have decided to go close to or during vintage so that we can see grapes being picked and wine being made. We are even going to get our hands dirty occasionally with some of our producers!

We have a long story at the end of this newsletter which addresses some of the issues raised by wine writer Huon Hooke in a recent extraordinary attack on Australia's sommeliers and young winemakers. Our view is that the "coterie" of sommeliers that he refers to are some of the most dedicated, professional and enthusiastic people we have every dealt with in any profession. Similarly many young Australian winemakers, who may not be well known and don't work for well-known companies are producing some of the most delicious wines in the country. We write to salute their efforts as well.

We have six special offers this month including one comprising wines from Dominique Belluard from the Savoie who produces elegant and exciting still and sparkling wines using the obscure yet delicious Gringet grape.

When we say six special offers we have included an additional "secret" one to rewards those who go to the trouble of reading the stories we provide. You will have to read the rest of the newsletter to find out what it is.

There are two special packs from the south of France – one red pack and one white pack highlighting the diversity of wines from this area. We also have a pack made up entirely of wines with alcohol levels that are less than 12% for those of you who would like to try these wines but don't want to suffer the next day. And, of course, wines with lower alcohol are less fattening too – just a thought!

We have put together a pack that traverses the famous Burgundy region from north to south highlighting the different styles that exist within this region which ranges from Chablis in the north (we have long sold out of our delicious Chablis wines but we have included a very similar style white wine from Vézelay which is close by) to the southern part of Beaujolais where Bourgogne wines are permitted. And, finally we have repeated the no sulphites special pack from last month.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

We have also included a story about the Bourboulenc grape variety to highlight the great work being done by Philippe Gimel in the Ventoux region where he produces stellar white wines that include this variety and a story about the Maranges appellation which is a relatively new appellation in Burgundy. We also preview a series of stories we will be writing in future newsletters about the vessels that are used for fermenting and maturing wines.

For a full list of wines currently in stock and their prices see:

http://www.livingwines.com.au/Catalogue/Buy_wines.htm

There is a link to our order form for these packs and any other wines at the end of this newsletter. But there's no need to use the order form. Just send us an email listing the wines and/or packs you would like to order if that suits you better. We'll confirm the price by return email before processing your order.

New arrivals: Dominique Belluard

. We are delighted to have received the sparkling Ayse¹ 2010 from Savoie producer Dominique Belluard made from the Gringet grape. This wine has been a staple offering at Garagistes (and also Sidecar before it closed) ever since it opened.

People love this sparkling wine made using the Methode Traditionelle which is the same method used to make Champagne. It is a savoury wine, with a fine bead and a long, long finish. We have good stocks at the moment, but we expect it to move fast.

We also have new supplies of the delectable Les Alpes 2012 which is a still wine made from the same grape. We chose this wine to accompany an amazing dish prepared by Mike Eggert and Gemma Whiteman from Pinbone based on their signature pork skin noodles at the annual Gourmet Traveller Restaurant Guide Awards recently.

We have designed a special six pack of Dominique's wines for you this month if you would like to explore this relatively unknown region and totally obscure grape variety.

Wine of the month: Bornard Melon le Rouge-Queue



The quality of the latest shipment of Philippe Bornard's wines is extraordinary. The Chardonnay called Le Blanc de la Rouge is outstanding, the blend of Chardonnay and Savagnin is intriguing and a repeat appearance of the Les Marnes 2006 made from Savagnin, is very welcome. It's a perfect match for semi-hard cheeses such as Comté and Gruyere.

However we always reserve special affection for the wine Philippe makes from a grape that is not even recognised by the official wine body in France – the INAO.

¹ Ayse is a separate Savoie appellation covering a tiny area around the village of the same name, where the rare Gringet grape is permitted. As far as we know, Dominique is the only commercial producer of wine made from this grape.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

They sanction only two white grape varieties in the Arbois, Arbois Pupillin and Côtes du Jura appellations, namely Chardonnay and Savagnin.

So where does the grape that the locals call **Melon le Queue-Rouge** fit in and why does Philippe produce a wine from this grape?

First things first. Melon is not the same grape that is found one hour away in northern Burgundy as well as in Muscadet called Melon de Bourgogne. Rather Melon is a grape that has mutated from Chardonnay in the Jura, a common process when grapes are moved to a different terroir with different soil types and climatic conditions.

Discussions with Philippe, his son Tony and with Michel Gahier who also grows Melon led us to believe that Melon differs from Chardonnay in the following ways:

- Melon has a smaller grape than Chardonnay;
- The skin of the Melon grape is thinner than that of Chardonnay;
- The stem attached to the Melon grape is a distinctive red colour (hence le Queue Rouge);
- The Melon grape contains an enzyme that causes the rapid formation of a veil of yeast (voile) on top of the wine that protects it from oxidation thus allowing winemakers to produce wines in a similar style to Vin Jaune (for example, Michel Gahier's La Fauquette).

And, of course, the other attribute that we should not discount is that it tastes different!

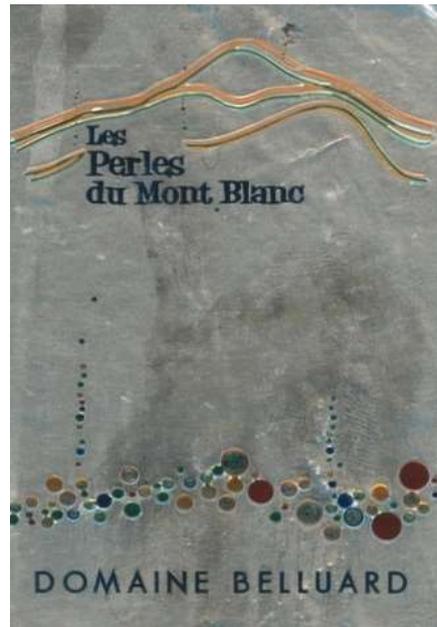
The 2011 vintage of Philippe's Melon is a masterpiece. It is incredibly savoury, it has loads of umami flavour, it is amazingly long and is a perfect accompaniment to a diverse range of foods from southern fried chicken (as per Belles Hot Chicken in Gertrude St, Melbourne) to spicy Sri Lankan curries to the brown rice bowl served with a spicy sambal at Tricycle in Hobart.

To celebrate our enjoyment of these incredibly complex white wines we are proposing a "Secret Bornard White Wine Six Pack" this month for those of you who have got round to reading this story. It consists of 2 bottles of Bornard Melon le Queue Rouge 2011, 2 bottles of Bornard Blanc de la Rouge Chardonnay 2009 and 2 bottles of Bornard les Chassagnes Savagnin 2011.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$370 but the pack price is **\$314.50 including freight.**

Remember to email asking for the Secret Bornard White Wine 6 pack!

Pack 1: Dominique Belluard white 6 pack



We are delighted to have the new arrivals of Dominique Belluard's renowned sparkling wines and a second shipment of Les Alpes 2012. To celebrate, we are offering a special pack of the new arrivals mixed with some of the old favourite white wines that are always greatly appreciated. We are particularly pleased to see the arrival of the sparkling Ayse wine which is a perennial favourite.

Domaine Belluard Savoie AOP Ayse Brut "Les Perles du Mont Blanc" 2010 (2 bottles) – This is a slight "rebadging" of the Belluard Ayse sparkling wine which is made from the rare Gringet grape. It is a sparkling wine that everyone loves and has been a staple offering at restaurants such as Garagistes.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Blanc Gringet Les Alpes 2012 – The Les Alpes just keeps getting better and better. This is an elegant wine that has beautiful mouth feel, intense fruit and mineral flavours and incredible length.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Blanc Gringet Le Feu (1 bottle of 2012 and 1 bottle of 2011) – The Le Feu is also made from Gringet but comes from a plot of land higher up the morainal slopes. The soil here is very rich in iron which flashes red in the sunlight (hence the name). The minerality of the soil is definitely reflected in this wine.

Domaine Belluard Vin de Savoie Blanc Altesse Grandes Jorasses 2010 – This elegant white is made from the local grape called Altesse or, sometimes, Roussette de Savoie. The vineyard from which this wine is made lies at an altitude of 450 metres above sea level. The grapes are hand-harvested and fermented naturally. The alcohol level is 12%. It is named after the Grandes Jorasses mountain - one of the highest peaks in the Alps.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$305 but the pack price is \$259.25 including freight.

Pack 2: Low alcohol wines 6 pack



We have selected a set of wines that are lower in alcohol than most wines on the market these days. With these you get a double bonus – less risk of a headache the next day and the consumption of fewer calories! All of these wines are below 12% in alcohol.

Hervé Villemade Vin de Pays du Loir et Cher Pivoine Rouge 2011 – This wine is made from 90% Malbec (called Côt in the Loire) and 10% Gamay and has only a little additional sulphur added so it is a fresh, lively expression of the terroir and the Malbec fruit. It is only 11% alcohol!

Michel Guignier Mélodie d'Automne Vin de France 2013 – This is a light, ethereal wine that gradually engulfs you with waves of flavour from the purity of the fruit in this wine. Michel often makes a lighter, fresher wine which he macerates for only 6 or 7 days in the concrete vats. As with all of Michel's wines, there are no sulphites added at any time.

Domaine de l'Octavin Vin de France Trousseau Les Corvées 2012 – This wine is a Trousseau made from grapes sourced from local vineyards. The reason it is a Vin de France is that the alcohol level is only 9.8% which is less than the required minimum of 10%. This is a fascinating wine which tends to polarise people – you'll either love or hate it. It has the colour of a rose but an intensity that belies it. It's a very versatile food wine, coping amazingly well with spicy food, but also perfect as an aperitif.

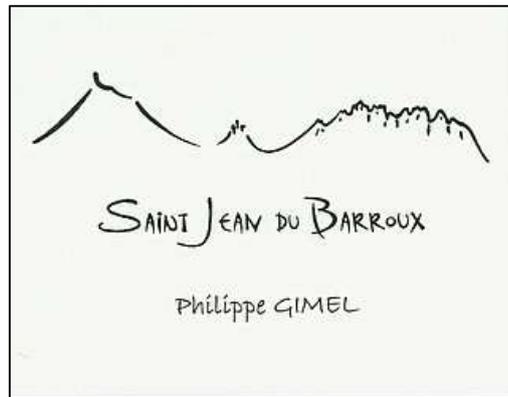
Terres Dorées FRV 100 2012 – This Gamay-based sparkling wine made in the pétillant naturel style is a very low 7.5%. The low-alcohol, however, does not detract from its interesting flavour of berry fruits and minerals coming from the granitic soils. When you pour this lightly petillant wine into the glass you notice the pink hue which is the result of the short time that the red skins have been in contact with the grape juice. It is a perfect aperitif or dessert wine, especially with berries.

Hervé Villemade Cheverny Les Ardilles Rouge 2011 – This is a deeply-flavoured blend of Pinot Noir (80%) and Gamay (20%) with a silky mouth-feel and a freshness and liveliness that is very appealing – surprising for a wine that is only 11% alcohol!

Yann Durieux Hautes Cotes de Nuits Les Ponts Blanc 2012 – This wine is made from Aligoté, but it is a wine with a difference. It is a white wine that has undergone 18 days of skin maceration to add complexity to the wine. It is therefore classified as an orange wine. Yann has shown amazing judgement in making this wine. There is still plenty of fruit characteristics here but the skin contact has added complexity.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$272 but the pack price is **\$231.20 including freight.**

Pack 3: Red wines of Southern France 6 pack



At this time of the year our thoughts turn to comforting red wines and there is no better place to find them than southern France. There is a remarkable range of grape varieties and wine styles in this region and the best wines are very good indeed. We have assembled a selection of six of the most interesting red wines of the region and have included one which is now ten years old from the Ventoux region to show that natural wines can have a long life and continue to improve with age. Three others in this pack are at least 6 years old

Saint Jean du Barroux Cotes du Ventoux Oligocene Red 2004 – If you like the wines of Chateauneuf-du-Pape, then you will love this wine made by former CdP winemaker Philippe Gimel who has vineyards on the slopes of the giant of the south, Mont Ventoux. From his vineyard you can see the summit of the mountain as well as the stunning Dentilles du Montmirail – the famous lace mountains that frame the southern Rhone vineyards. The wine is made from Grenache, Syrah, Carignan and Cinsault which come from vines that are harvested at extremely low yields (20 hectolitres per hectare). The wines see little wood in their maturation – Philippe Gimel prefers to use concrete and enamel instead. Only 5% of the wine is treated with wood and those barrels are ten years old!

Domaine du Pech Buzet Jarnicoton Rouge 2006 – The Jarnicoton is a Buzet appellation wine from South West France inland from Bordeaux which is a robust red wine made from 20% Cabernet Franc and 80% Merlot. It is a strong wine with a pronounced Merlot nose of fruit and berries but a flavour that is quite harmonious. The vines have been managed using biodynamic principles and the wine was vinified in tanks and it has achieved an alcohol level of 13.5%.

Le Petit Gimios Vin de France Rouge Fruit 2012 – This is an amazing wine! The grapes come from an exposed, rocky vineyard near St Jean de Minervois in the Languedoc, covered with low bush vines with thick trunks that help them stand up to the wind that pushes down from the mountains behind. No wires tame the vines because Anne-Marie likes to walk through the vineyard as she chooses. There are at least sixteen different grape varieties planted in this place. But they are randomly planted. There might be a Carignan vine and then two Cinsault vines, followed by an Aramon and then a couple of Grenache. And the vineyard also contains Oeillade,

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

Terret Rose, Terret Noir, Terret Blanc, Syrah, Muscat and Alicante. It has no added sulphites.

Domaine de Cause Marines Vin de Table Sept Souris 8002 – This wine is also from South West France, with the vineyard situated in the beautiful, rolling hills outside the ancient town of Gaillac. The Sept Souris 8002 is a Vin de Table wine and is made from 100% Syrah which is not permitted in the Gaillac appellation. Despite being a Vin de Table it is a wine of considerable elegance and is the flagship wine of this exciting domaine. This wine is drinking very nicely right now with exceptionally fine tannins and a long, satisfying finish. It is not permitted in France to put the vintage on the label of Vin de Table wines but if you look at the name of the wine it doesn't take too long to work it out!

Mylène Bru Coteaux du Languedoc Far-Ouest Rouge 2012 – Mylène runs a small biodynamic 5 hectare vineyard in the mountains behind the Mediterranean port of Sete in the commune of Saint-Pargoire. Here she grows Grenache, Syrah, Carignan and Cinsault with small amounts of a very rare grape from the Rhone called Aubun as well as Marselan and Tempranillo. The Far Ouest is a blend of all the red grapes so it has some Grenache, Syrah, Carignan and Cinsault but might also have a little Marselan and Aubun (an obscure grape from the Vaucluse) depending on the vintage.

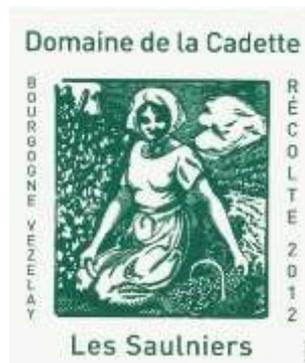
Domaine Milan Vin de Table de France Le Vallon Rouge 2008 – Domaine Milan occupies prime real estate in the holiday town of St Remy de Provence. The immaculate vineyards are framed by both suburban estates and the famous nearby mountains called the Alpilles that provide climatic protection for the vineyards. This wine is fermented with wild yeasts then matured for a year in old barrels after a short whole-bunch maceration. The grape varieties are Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault and Mourvedre. The alcohol is 13.5% but in perfect balance.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$284 but the pack price is \$241.40 including freight.



The lush vineyards of Henri Milan with the Alpilles behind

Pack 4: Traversing Burgundy 6 pack



We have selected six wines which start in the north of Burgundy in Vézelay and wind down through Burgundy until we finally reach the southern-most area where wines can be labelled with this appellation in the village of Charnay just north of Lyon.

Domaine de la Cadette Bourgogne Vézelay Les Saulniers 2012 – The beautiful Les Saulniers vineyard lies close to the village of Vézelay which is perched on top of a hill overlooking the village of St Père where Domaine de la Cadette is domiciled. Here the white wines are considered the finest so they can carry the special Bourgogne Vézelay appellation on the label. This elegant wine is 100% Chardonnay.

Catherine & Dominique Derain Gevrey-Chambertin En Vosne Rouge 2011 – Once you travel further south past Dijon, one of the first appellations you arrive at is the stunning Gevrey-Chambertin area. Here the red wines are strong yet very elegant and this one is drinking very nicely right now. En Vosne is the vineyard.

Fanny Sabre Bourgogne Aligoté 2012 – A little further south you arrive at the famous red wine area of Pommard where some of the finest red wines of Burgundy are made. Over thirty years ago, Fanny's father decided to plant the white grape Aligoté here to take advantage of the famous soils.

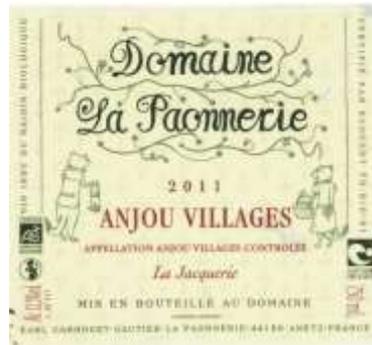
Sextant Bourgogne Blanc 2012 – Further south again we reach the village of Saint Aubin where Dominique Derain makes his lovely wines and his former apprentice, Julien Altaber, now has his own winery and is making wines that are making everyone sit up and take notice. While this is a Bourgogne level wine the grapes are sourced from vineyards near the famous Puligny Montrachet.

Catherine & Dominique Derain Mercurey La Plante Chassey Rouge 2009 – Further south we arrive at the small appellation of Mercurey which is slowly emerging as an area to watch, especially with a number of young, energetic, biodynamic winemakers moving to this area to take advantage of the lower prices for vineyards here. The La Plante Chassey vineyard faces south east and has clay soils.

Terres Dorées Bourgogne Pinot Noir 2012 – Finally we reach the village of Charnay in southern Beaujolais, which is technically part of Burgundy. Most winemakers use the Gamay grape here (including Jean-Paul), but if they have plots of Pinot Noir they are able to label it as a Burgundy wine. This is great wine for the price.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$330 but the pack price is \$280.50 including freight.

Pack 5: No added sulphites red 6 pack



This month we are pleased to be able to once again offer a no added sulphites red wine pack for those of you who love the vibrancy associated with wines that do not have sulphur added at any stage of the winemaking process.

Michel Gahier Arbois Trousseau Le Grands Vergers 2012 – This is a very, very good example of a Trousseau wine having the delicacy that we associate with this fragile grape but also an extraordinary depth of flavour and a complexity that is intriguing. The wine is lively on the nose, has deep flavours (hints of cherry and raspberry and forest floors in autumn) and it tastes alive.

Domaine la Paonnerie Anjou Villages La Jacquerie 2011 Sans Soufre – This wine is a blend of 66% Cabernet Franc and 34% Cabernet Sauvignon picked from the Clos de la Jacquerie which the Carroget's own exclusively. The grapes are picked when the Cabernet Sauvignon has reached the desired level of ripeness. This is a lively, vibrant wine that is very pluggable!

Michel Guignier Vin de France Mélodie d'Automne 2013 – This is a light, ethereal wine that gradually engulfs you with waves of flavour from the purity of the fruit in this wine. When we first tried it at the Renaissance event in Angers this year we were immediately captivated by its charms.

Domaine Milan Sans Soufre Ajouté Rouge 2012 – This wine is made with grape varieties Grenache, Shiraz, Mourvedre, Cinsault and Cabernet Sauvignon and spends 8 months in old barriques. This is a great wine for people who have developed a reaction to sulphur or for those who love the freshness of natural wines.

Le Petit Gimios Vin de France Rouge Fruit 2012 – This is an amazing wine! There are at least sixteen different grape varieties planted in this place. There is Carignan, Cinsault, Aramon, Grenache, Oeillade, Terret Rose, Terret Noir, Terret Blanc, Syrah, Muscat and Alicante among others. The grapes are co-fermented to produce this amazing soft, round, subtle red with layers that seems to go on forever.

Domaine la Paonnerie Coteaux d'Ancenis "Simplement Gamay" 2012 – This is made from 100% Gamay Noir a jus Blanc. The wine is fermented with natural yeasts and is neither filtered nor fined. This is a light, lively delicious no-sulphur red wine that goes beautifully with food such as lamb chops or roast chicken or a robust cheese.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$256 but the pack price is \$217.60 including freight.

Pack 6: White wines of Southern France 6 pack



To complement our Pack 3 this month which looks at the red wines of Southern France we have also assembled a 6 pack of white wines from the same area. The wines we have chosen are at the top end of the market with some absolute stunners among them. Many of these wines will last for a very long time and some already have some age on them.

Domaine de Causse Marines Vin de Table Zacmau 2102 – As we mentioned in the Southern Red pack description, Causse Marines have vineyards just outside the ancient city of Gaillac which lies north east of Toulouse. Here, Patrice and Virginie are working with a small group of local producers to save many of the local ancient varieties from extinction. Mauzac was being pulled out of many of the local vineyards to make way for international varieties such as Chardonnay. The Zacmau 2102 is a white Vin de Table wine made from 100% Mauzac, the favoured local white grape of the area. This is a classy, elegant wine that shows what Mauzac is capable of, especially when yields are as low as 20 hectolitres per hectare. It is a complex wine with considerable finesse with lots of the characteristic Mauzac flavour and a very long and very satisfying finish.

Mylène Bru Vin de Table Lady Chasselas Blanc 2013 – The plot where Mylène has her Chasselas vines is a site of amazing beauty. It is about an hour inland from the seaside town of Sète. There are no other vineyards for kilometres around. There is a long view over the short-cropped vines to the mountains beyond. The vines are at least 50 years old and face East North East. Chasselas is almost unknown in this region so this is a very rare wine, but one of some delicacy and with a really lovely mouth-feel. The clay and limestone soils give the wine a persistent minerality that is very appealing. The finish is quite dry. This wine has no added sulphites.

Saint Jean du Barroux Ventoux La Montagne Blanc 2007 – Philippe Gimel only produces one white wine and it is usually a blend of Clairette, Grenache Blanc and Bourboulenc with each contributing one third of the blend. The yield for his white grapes is a low 25 hectolitres per hectare in the 2007 vintage. The grapes were hand picked and then put through a vertical press. About 75% of the wine was put into tanks and the remainder into old barrels. The wine was bottled in 2008 and has the structure necessary to age for up to 20 years.

Le Petit Gimios Vin de Table Muscat Sec des Roumanis 2010 – This wine is unlike any other Muscat you are likely to have tried. The Lavaysse family add nothing to their wine to change the essential characteristics of the Muscat a Petit Grains grape variety. As such they produce a wine of great interest and complex characters. The grapes are harvested from old vines that produce exceptionally low yields therefore the flavour is quite concentrated in the grapes that are harvested. No added sulphites.

Le Petit Gimios Muscat Liqueur 2002 – This wine is made from the Muscat a Petit Grains grape variety started in a very similar way to the Sec des Roumanis but the fermentation has been stopped by the addition of alcohol in the tradition of wines such as Muscat de Beaumes de Venise or Muscat de Rivesaltes. The end result is a delicious, sweet wine of incredible complexity that lasts for ages after it has been opened and is perfect for the restaurant trade for something very different to offer guests to pair with desserts. It is also perfect for retail customers who want a drink they can keep in the fridge and dip into from time to time.

Domaine Milan Vin de Table Le Carrée Roussanne 2011 – The Le Carrée is a refined, elegant, complex wine that shows the wonderful characteristics of the Roussanne grape in its best light. It is labelled as a Vin de Table because white wines made from 100% Roussanne are not permitted in the Les Baux de Provence appellation. This wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts, matured in tanks for a year and then transferred to barriques for a further 9 months. No filtration or fining is used to preserve the flavour of this special wine. This wine will keep for a long time and continue to improve in the bottle. We only have a small supply of this sought-after wine as only 1000 bottles are produced.

The RRP for this selection of 6 bottles of wine is \$367 but the pack price is **\$311.95 including freight.**



Bush vines at Le Petit Domaine de Gimios

Grape variety: Bourboulenc

Bourboulenc is rarely talked about in Australia because, apart from a tiny planting in South Africa this grape is entirely confined to a small area of southern France. And the planting are diminishing somewhat. In 1958 there were 1,279 hectares under cultivation, however by 2008 this had declined to 622 hectares², under half of the previous coverage.

It is most probably a native grape of the Vaucluse area of southern France centred around the Mont Ventoux area. There are some reports that it is of Greek origin, however recent studies have confirmed it as a native grape to the Vaucluse.

One reason for its reasonably wide plantings in Provence and more recently in the Languedoc is that it thrives in sunny, warm and very dry conditions and ripens late. It also has thick skins which makes it less susceptible to some forms of diseases which plague these areas.

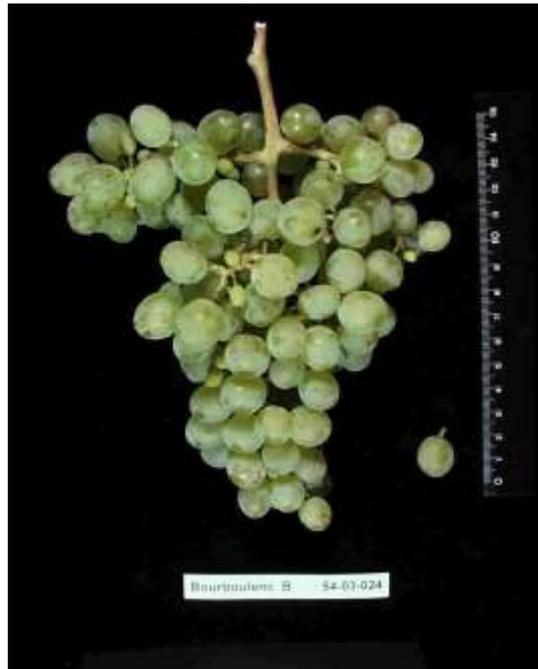
The leaf of the Bourboulenc grape are almost five-sided with a distinct lobe at the bottom as can be seen from the photo below..



The leaf of the Bourboulenc vine (Source *Vitis International Variety Catalogue*)

The leaf is also a light green with brown patches. The grapes form quite distinctively loose bunches of the thick-skinned grapes. In the photo below you can see that, unlike many other grape varieties where the bunches are very tightly packed, the grapes here are quite separated allowing the air to circulate which helps reduce disease pressure.

² Source *Vitis International Variety Catalogue*



The bunches of the Bourboulenc grape (Source Vitis International Variety Catalogue)

Bourboulenc gains credibility by being one of the official white grapes that can be used to make white Chateauneuf-du-Pape, those powerful and elegant wines from the southern Rhone. In all there are 18 grape varieties allowed in the red and white wines there with no restrictions – this makes it similar to Champagne where there are 7 different varieties and the wine can be made from any combination of them. In fact, in Chateauneuf it is possible to make white wines from any combination of red and white grapes – white wines can even be made from red grapes only if someone thought it was a good idea.

Other AOPs where Bourboulenc is an approved grape include Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence, Bandol and Cassis (where it is known as Doucillon Blanc) in the south of Provence. It is also permitted as a support grape in the tiny appellation of Bellet which nestles in the suburbs of Nice.

It is also found in Ventoux, Luberon, Beames de Venise, Gigondas and Vacqueyras in the Vaucluse, Lirac, Coteaux du Tricastin, Costières de Nîmes and Tavel in the Gard as well as the broader Côtes du Rhône and Côtes du Rhône-Villages appellations. Some is also found in the Vinsobres appellation which crosses from the Vaucluse into the Drome department.

There is a mention of Bourboulenc in the Saint Chinian appellation in the Languedoc (which is famous for its steely Carignan reds) where it is permissible provided the vines were planted prior to 2005. Other areas in the Languedoc where Bourboulenc has been introduced include Corbières, Minervois (where it is often blended with Macabeo) and the broader Languedoc AOP (including La Clape).

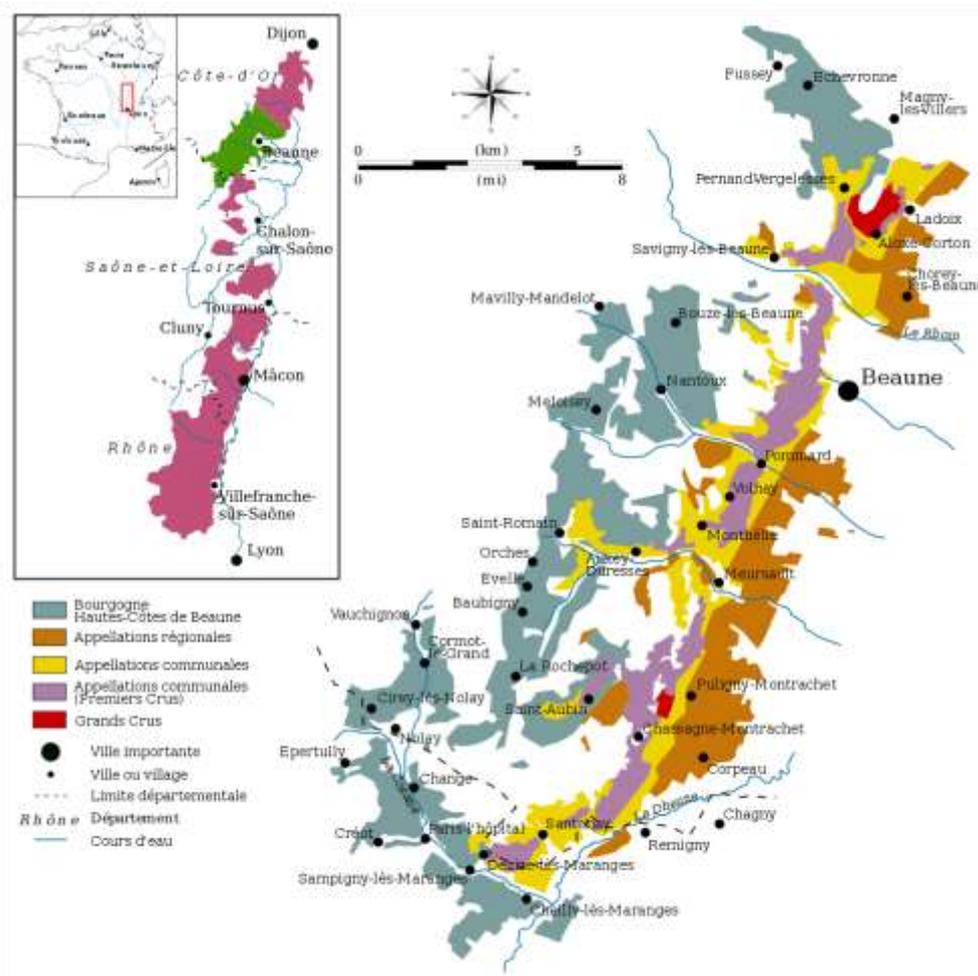
A great example of a wine made from this grape is the Saint Jean du Barroux La Montagne White 2007 which has equal parts Bourboulenc, Clairette and Grenache Blanc. This is made by talented winemaker Philippe Gimel who crafts his wines on the slopes of Mont Ventoux in Vaucluse.

Appellation: Maranges

As you drive south from Beaune you pass through the prized red wines appellations of Pommard and Volnay then quite soon hit the most famous white wine appellations of Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet before arriving at a cluster of smaller, but still very smart, younger appellations such as Santenay, Rully, Maranges and then Mercurey at about the 22 kilometre mark south of Beaune.

These villages are very close to the village of Bouzeron where Aubert de Villaine, owner of the famous Domaine de la Romanee-Conti has established his private vineyards due to the quality of the terroir in this area.

Maranges is an appellation established in 1989 within the Côtes de Beaune and covers the communes of Cheilly-lès-Maranges, Dezize-lès-Maranges and Sempigny-lès-Maranges. Most of the wine produced here is red but white wines are also permitted even though they only account for around 5% of the production.



The three Maranges communes are shown at the bottom of the map (Source Wikipedia)

There are seven premier cru sites within the appellation, namely Clos de la Boutière, Clos de la Fussièrre, La Fussièrre, Le Clos des Loyères, Le Clos des Rois, Le Croix Moines and Les Clos Roussots.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

For white wines the only permitted grape variety is Chardonnay. For red wines the principal grape variety is Pinot Noir which can have added to it small amounts of Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc or Pinot Gris provided the total area of white wines planted in each parcel does not exceed 15% of the total.

The red wines from here are a deep red colour and have a fresh, peppery flavour that it quite long. While the colour is deep the wines are quite smooth and elegant with beautiful tannin structure. These wines now have a cult-like following among wine aficionados who search for interesting wines from emerging appellations.

We are delighted to have received a shipment of magnums from this appellation from emerging winemaker Julien Altaber. This is a beautifully structured wine which teams nicely with a wide range of food styles.

How wine matures: a new series



Alice Bouvot from Domaine de l'Octavin: fermenting Pinot in a fibreglass tank

During the time we have been visiting France and beyond on our wine adventures, we have become increasingly fascinated by the effect on wine of the containers in which it is fermented and aged.

Our producers use a wide range of vessels including amphorae, concrete “eggs”, concrete tanks, fibreglass tanks, stainless steel tanks, glass demi-johns, massive old wooden tonneau and old wooden barrels. The two vessel types that we rarely see used are new oak barrels or any form of plastic or polyurethane.

The reason why new oak barrels are never used is due to the oaky, vanilla flavour that dominates the wine and completely masks the subtle nuances of terroir such as minerality and herbal notes. New oak also takes a long time to integrate seamlessly into wine and most people don't want to wait twenty years to try a wine they are interested in drinking.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

The vessel plays an important role both during fermentation and then during the maturation phase. Some of our winemakers use the same vessel for both phases some use different vessels.

In the next newsletter we will be discussing fibreglass tanks and some of the winemakers who use them.

“Restaurant wine lists too trendy” – Our take on Huon Hooke’s recent article

We were somewhat surprised to read an article in the Sydney Morning Herald recently entitled “Restaurant wine lists too trendy” by long-time wine writer and wine judge Huon Hooke. The title of the article gives an indication of what lies within.

Now we need to state up front that we bring a set of biases to this discussion. We import obscure wines from obscure appellations in France – really obscure ones like wines from the Aveyron made from the Negret de Banhars grape – as well as many that we thought weren’t obscure such as Vouvrays from the Loire made, of course, with Chenin Blanc (surprisingly in his article Huon Hooke described Loire Valley Chenin Blancs as obscure). We also have a strong bias towards organic and biodynamic grapes and a strong bias towards naturally fermented wines with no additives except occasionally a little sulphur. In other words we are biased towards natural wines. We love every one of the wines we bring to Australia. We find every one of them delicious!

Does this mean that we try to convert people to drinking natural wines? Not at all! We are happy to educate wine drinkers, but if they want to continue to drink conventional wines, and that is what the vast majority of drinkers want to do, then we understand that completely.

Exactly the same happens with food. We don’t form picket lines outside supermarkets where people throng to buy, in the main, non-organic, often highly-processed food products. It is their right. We have spent the last twenty five years extolling the benefits of organic food products but we certainly won’t stop anyone from eating conventionally grown food products.

In other words, we have a set of strong preferences but we don’t tell other people that their different preferences are wrong.

Before we analyse the article we would like to explain a little bit about how we became involved with importing natural wines and the factors that have shaped our philosophical commitment to them and our Bacchanalian enjoyment of them.

Some background

We have always enjoyed wine. Until the 1990s we had always enjoyed big, bold Australian reds as well as a healthy dose of French and Italian wines, also often big and bold.

Things changed in that decade when we started spending a lot of time in Sydney and Melbourne working in the IT industry with friends from Brisbane. These friends preferred white wines and we started to explore these in more depth. Often they would be organic, but not always.

We were interested enough in wine to buy the Wine Spectator and to absorb the scores assigned to the wines. During a trip to Burgundy late in that decade we hired a well-known French wine writer to take us on a tour of Burgundy. We left it up to him to choose the vineyards except for one. We insisted that he take us to the winemaker rated “best” by the Wine Spectator at 99/100. We thought that this would really show us what a great Burgundy wine would be like.

When we met the wine writer he expressed concern about our choice. We, however insisted and he took us there, although somewhat reluctantly. And it was a revelation!

We were soon swilling and spitting massive, over-extracted, over-oaked monsters that bore no similarity to Pinot Noir. These were the 99/100 wines. We hated them.

The three of us departed quickly and our host was gracious enough not to say “I told you so” but we could read it in his face. He then said “I will now show you the real Burgundy” and took us to nearby Chambolle-Musigny where he exposed us to a range of light, flavoursome, lingering, pale beauties that totally resonated with us.

Another little step along the way occurred when we visited the French Laundry in California a couple of years later. While we were perusing the menu, a woman at the next table was going through every dish on the menu with the waiter asking him about the provenance of the ingredients, whether they were organic, whether the animals were free range and a million other questions. The waiter patiently answered all her questions.

This experience remained with us and later when we visited the Verre Volé in Paris in the mid-2000s and saw that every table had a bottle of Foillard Morgon on the table, we thought we had better order one and wine drinking for us began to change. We were stunned by the freshness and quality of the wine and wanted to explore more about it. When it was explained to us that it was a natural wine we were intrigued and decided to continue further down the path that had been laid out before us. All this was subsequently helped along by some quiet education from Nick Hildebrandt from the Bentley, who has a remarkable ability to teach his customers without in any way showing off his immense knowledge.

This led us to think that, just like the woman at the French Laundry, people would soon start to ask about what was in their wine and how the grapes have been treated in the vineyard and in the winemaking process. They would start to ask about the many additions and manipulations that are permitted in the wine industry.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

So we gradually started importing these wines and we have slowly moved towards more and more natural expressions of wine with low sulphur or no sulphur and we are very glad that we have.

In parallel with our being exposed to more and more natural wines something else happened – our palates changed! They have become more savoury, they have become more attuned to the nuances of lighter wines, they have become incredibly intolerant to new wood flavours and they have become intolerant of highly extracted wines.

Since all this happened we have also been talking to our producers who have gone down the natural path and have been exposed to other arguments that have strengthened our commitment to these wines.

Some of our winemakers have converted to natural winemaking because that is what they like to drink. They make the wines for themselves and their friends and if others want to buy them it is a bonus. Others have converted due to allergies and skin conditions caused by the chemical sprays they were using.

We have since discovered medical research that shows that vineyard workers in France have a much higher incidence of cancer than the general population. This is an extraordinary figure considering the generally healthy lifestyle they lead working out in the open. However the vines were laden with chemical sprays and these are the likely cause of the problem. We don't want to play even a small role in encouraging workers to have to use chemical sprays – they are just too dangerous.

So that is the background and those are our biases. We will now examine the article by Huon Hooke and make some comments about his assertions.

Huon Hooke

We have only met Huon once very briefly at a party in Sydney. We have, however, in the past, read his columns and followed his suggestions when we were in our “big wine” phase. We have always enjoyed his writing and we absolutely respect his knowledge and commitment to the wine industry, especially the Australian wine industry. He is without doubt one of Australia's most respected wine journalists.

We just don't agree with the tenor of the article. In this story we've responded to some of his key statements. His words are in italics.

The article and our comments

Something has gone very wrong with Australia's top restaurant wine lists.

From my viewpoint - and I've been on judging panels of wine-list awards for 20 years - our top restaurant wine lists have lost their way.

The first sentence is good craftsmanship, a writer needs to grab the audience by the throat and make them take notice. This works well.

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

The second sentence has an embedded justification of what is about to appear and that is he has been judging these lists so he knows what he is talking about. What isn't mentioned is that the judging of wine lists is as subjective as the judging of restaurants – everything is in the eye of the beholder and the contrived rules that are used to make the judgements.

We could make up a set of rules for judging a wine list that would ensure that most of the top Sydney wine lists scored very high marks. Equally we could make up a set of rules whereby they scored very low marks.

We are reminded of a restaurant judging methodology that has some currency in this country whereby a number of points are awarded for how promptly the restaurant answers your phone call and how courteous they are in taking your booking. No marks can be awarded if the restaurant has a no bookings policy! It is all subjective.

We still don't know at this stage why restaurant wine lists have lost their way, but all will be revealed soon!

This year, one of the leading wine list competitions, Australia's Wine List of the Year Awards, sponsored by Fine Wine Partners, announced dual winners of its top award. The two national award winners are Lake House, of Daylesford in Victoria, and Perth's Rockpool Bar & Grill.

My main beef with the types of wine lists that regularly win these big gongs is that they are unbalanced - far too international, with almost embarrassing small offerings of Australian wines.

And now we know what the problem is. Restaurants should favour Australian wines over international wines. But there is no justification for this assertion. The statement is made as if it is some sort of eternal truism. Why shouldn't there be international wines on the list at these places? These are two of the top restaurants in Australia that attract an eclectic and internationally-focussed set of customers. Maybe the restaurants have done their research and worked out what their customers want.

When we sit in top restaurants these days and listen to the conversations around us the dominant topic is "overseas". Australians who go to these restaurants are very mobile. They travel frequently. They enjoy the tastes and flavours of other countries. They are not overtly parochial.

My second beef is that they are top-heavy with the same sorts of wines – wines that are deemed desirable by a small coterie of sommeliers centred on Melbourne and Sydney. These are usually micro-boutique wineries, often obscure. No problem if they are excellent: the problem is they're often not. The wines often seem selected on rarity and trendiness rather than quality or value-for-money. Wolf Blass, Penfolds, Wynns, Lindemans? Forget it. You're lucky to see anything from these wineries on these lists, except for the token Granges.

So now we can see where this is going. An attack on a coterie of sommeliers who are seeking out obscure wines from obscure wineries, possibly even from obscure

appellations. No mention of the fact that many Australians seem to be desperate for 'obscure' wines after living through two or three decades of single variety Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Shiraz from Australia, often with high levels of alcohol, as feted by wine writers and Australian wine show judges. Maybe the sommeliers have detected this and are actually responding to their customers' requirements.

Clearly they are giving the customers more credit for making intelligent choices than some of our wine writers. They are closer to the customers than the wine writers. They deal with them every day and we find them to be a very honourable and very professional group of men and women who are trying to match their wine list to the new wave of customers who are coming through their doors.

Our own experience is that many customers are highly knowledgeable and are wanting to seek out new flavours, new textures and new wine experiences. When we have set up stands at the public wine tastings we conduct throughout Australia including events such as Rootstock and Handmade, it is the young, enthusiastic wine consumers who knock the doors down seeking out new experiences. Not once have we ever been asked if a wine has a medal or not once has someone not wanted to try a wine because they haven't heard of the grape variety or the appellation. They are a new breed – they celebrate difference.

And there is a final point we need to comment on. We often hear critics of natural wines use a very similar sentence to "*No problem if they are excellent: the problem is they're often not.*" Wine writers often believe that there is a single gold standard for wine judging and wine assessment. We have said above that we find every one of our wines to be delicious. Mr Hooke may not find them all delicious but his palate is different to ours. He has to recognise that there is not an absolute definition of delicious. Other people find our wines delicious otherwise they would not keep ordering them time after time!

Increasingly, these "top" lists are choked with allegedly biodynamic or organic wines. Allegedly, because they aren't always. Take Lake House. It lists Bass Phillip, Bindi, Kerri Thomson's KT and Kumeu River as biodynamic. But they're not. Bindi is a wonderful producer using minimal intervention in vineyard and winery, but has never aspired to be organic or BD, and has no plans to. Bass Phillip uses many BD practices but is not certified, and probably would not meet the criteria. If you're not certified, you're not biodynamic.

We couldn't follow the logic here. Why is "choking" a wine list with organic or biodynamic wines that do not have pesticide residues a bad thing? There are many scientific studies that we have reviewed in our newsletter that point to the adverse effects of chemical sprays on the environment, on the grape vines and on the wine itself. We celebrate those restaurants who aspire to serve wine made with minimal intervention just as we celebrate those who aspire to serve organically-produced food.

Huon also claims that if you are not certified you are not biodynamic. This we must take exception to. Some of the strictest biodynamic producers we work with are not certified, however they belong to organisations such as S.A.I.N.S or Vin Nature or

Wine Talk – the newsletter of Living Wines

Return to Terroir which have codes of conduct and peer review regimes which are just as strict as the certifying organisations.

It's also irritating to see on wine labels and wine lists "Biodynamic in conversion". Sorry: they're still not biodynamic.

We think that this is a very honourable thing for a winemaker to put on their label. It is telling us that they are practicing biodynamics but that the soil has not yet fully recovered from the ravages of the chemical pollutants that have been used in the past. We celebrate their honesty and it's a signal to us to support them.

Many wine lists in our great restaurants such as Quay now have a section on "orange" wines, that is, wines made from white grapes fermented on their skins. Again, this is a fascination of sommeliers, not the public. Some of these wines are OK, but many are plain awful.

We have written about the confusion in many conventional quarters about orange wines in the past, but we cannot agree with the claim here. Orange wines are highly sought after by our customer base and by the customer base of these restaurants – look, for example, at the proportion of orange wines being drunk on any night at 121BC or Garagistes or Clever Polly's or 10 William Street or Fratelli Paradiso without the sommelier even suggesting such a wine. We agree that some orange wines are awful. We have had a few awful ones. However good orange wines (of which there are many) are a perfect match for a wide range of foods and we regularly enjoy a skin contact Rory from d'Meure wines in Tasmania as well as those from some of the small, exciting winemakers mentioned in the next paragraph. Like all styles of wines, drinkers will find some that they think are good and some that they think are awful. Why make this point specifically about "orange wines".

The groovy wines that appear on these lists with uncanny frequency include Ruggabellus, Jauma, Ochota Barrels, Brash Higgins, Sami-Odi, Syrahmi and Jamsheed. They are darlings of the sommeliers, and largely unknown to the wider public. Some of their wines are very good indeed, but are they representative of what's available in the market or what the public would ask for? No. But their presence on so many lists leads to the same suspicion as the presence of reams of obscure imported wines. They are there because sommeliers love them, and not only that, they depend on a sommelier's advice to sell them to the diner. This gives the sommelier a reason to be there.

The central problem with this section is that we would have thought that restaurants would not want to go down the path of offering wines that are "representative of what's available in the market place". If we went into a restaurant and what was on offer was the same as we could buy at the local Vintage Cellars or Dan Murphy's, we would be highly disappointed and be arguing for being able to BYO.

If you apply the same argument to food, the likes of Quay and Lake House should be serving chops and mashed spuds because that is food the majority of the public is likely to be familiar with. Applied logically this argument is also an argument against a chef working with unfamiliar ingredients that the majority of diners may not know.

There's also just a hint here, perhaps unintended, that sommeliers are deliberately choosing unknown wines as a form of job protection. If the wines are unfamiliar they'll always have a job. On behalf of all the thoroughly professional, charming, hard-working, dedicated sommeliers we know, we find that quite an offensive allegation, so much so that we had to read it two or three times just to make sure it said what we thought it said.

And, finally, there's just a hint of a much bigger problem that's not of Huon Hooke's making but we think is at the heart of this story. Traditionally Australian wine reviewing and scoring for newspapers is based around a process of receiving samples, tasting them (we understand usually blind), scoring them, and writing about them. Unlike restaurant reviewers, where for reputable publications meals are generally paid for and so the reviewer can choose the restaurant, with this type of wine reviewing the only wines that will be reviewed are the ones which come from wine companies that provide samples. Generally, they tend to be the larger companies, which means that if small Australian producers like Ruggabellus, Jauma, and Ochota Barrels, choose not to send samples their wines will never be reviewed. And it's the same with small importers. We will never send unsolicited samples to a wine writer, although if someone requests a sample because we have something which they think might fit with a story they are writing, we'll always do our best to provide it.

We've seen too many photos of hallways stacked high with bottles, seen sheds full of Australia Post boxes (thanks Winsor for sharing some of yours with us!), and heard the story from our friend Mike Bennie of how he was forced to move post offices because his local couldn't cope with the constant stream of boxes arriving for him to even contemplate putting a bottle from one of our tiny allocation of bottles into this mix, where it might drown under the weight of the juggernaut.

If wines like Jauma and its maker James Erskine, whose wines are feted in London, Paris, the US, Hong Kong and Tokyo, are obscure in Australia isn't the travesty with our system of wine writing. They shouldn't be obscure – they should be celebrated.

It's a standing joke in the wine trade that Hardys, Jacob's Creek, Lindemans, Yalumba and McWilliam's will sooner fly to the moon than be seen on fashionable restaurant wine lists. The usual justification is that price comparisons with retailers make these wines look so expensive that customers won't order them. Could this be because restaurants routinely pile 150 to 250 per cent on the cost price of wines?

We can't comment on this as we are not part of the conventional wine trade so the joke has gone over our heads.

Rockpool Bar & Grill Perth, for example, is a massive tome, with 1900 listings, but I counted fewer than 500 Australian wines. Take out the big verticals of Grange, Moss Wood, Cullen and Henschke and it's even fewer. Does this cater to an Australian clientele? If you dine in a top French or Italian restaurant, don't you expect to see an emphasis on the wines of that country? Why not here?

The answer to this is simple. The French and Italians are very parochial and often won't drink a wine from a vineyard they can't see out the window, much less

another region or country. They usually don't drink wines from a different part of their own country. Having said that, this situation is changing slowly and we were interested to see that the team from Le Chateaubriand in Paris has recently opened a bottle shop along the street that sells no French wines but they do sell wines from most of the obscure, small Australian producers mentioned above.

Australians are lucky to be more open-minded. We'll generally try unfamiliar foods and, in the same way, many people are keen to try unfamiliar wines. And we are lucky that some of our restaurants choose to give us access to wines from many parts of the world. We see that as a cause for celebration not for concern.

While we have every respect for a restaurant that only chooses to list local wines, especially if they do it because of a passionate commitment to their particular region, we are grateful that we can now drink interesting wines from the USA, from Georgia, Greece and of course from France and Italy.

There are hardly any local or New Zealand sauvignon blancs and only a couple of WA semillon sauvignon blancs - although it's a Perth establishment. Also hardly any pinot gris - the fastest growing category of all at present. But there are masses of obscure and eccentric wines, such as French chenin blancs and sauvignon blancs, and the obligatory list of Didier Dagueneau Sancerre, whose wines are on every flash restaurant list although they're very expensive.

This seems to be a call for mediocrity. Let's satisfy the middle ground who probably rarely dine at these places. And as for calling Chenin Blanc obscure?????

I try to put myself in the shoes of the average Aussie diner, and have to conclude that with some top restaurant wine lists, such as Sydney's Bentley, there is often precious little that any normal person will recognise. It's a bit irritating.

We find the list at the Bentley one of the most thoughtful and engaging in Australia and it is a place where you can place yourself in the highly capable hands of the award winning sommelier who has an uncanny knack of picking the right wine for each diner. We never get irritated here!

Between the obsessions with "orange" wines, biodynamic, the Jura, Greece, Mount Etna and indeed, anything seriously obscure, the drinking diner is at the mercy of the sommelier. Maybe that's their plan. But too many wine lists smack of someone desperate to prove that he or she has a global view of wine.

The thesis that it is somehow reprehensible for a sommelier to have a global view is very strange. The more often Australian wines are put up against international wines in the dining context (not the rarefied and disconnected show judging context) the more chance there will be that Australian winemakers will follow the lead of the small group mentioned above and start to make wines that complement rather than dominate food and then we can assign the massive Shiraz wines with their 16% and above alcohol levels to the dustbin of history.

How to order

You can order any of these packs by sending us an email to wine@livingwines.com.au

Or for other wines you can use our order form.

http://www.livingwines.com.au/Catalogue/Order_Form_Current_2014.pdf