

NEWS

A connoisseur's guide to the finest wines

By Don Fridley
YELLIN' REBEL

Wine Growing Regions: The grape of red Burgundy, the Pinot Noir is, along with the Cabernet Sauvignon, one of the two greatest red wine grapes. There may be arguments among wine lovers as to which is the best wine, Burgundy or Bordeaux, but most knowledgeable wine consumers would not argue about the dual supremacy of Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon.

In Burgundy, it is grown in the Cote d'Or (the Slope of Gold) and is the only grape permitted for the

red wine there. Unlike Bordeaux and many of the other wine regions in the world, Burgundy makes wines from a single grape variety. The reds are made from either the Pinot Noir or the Gamay (in Beaujolais), and the whites are made from the Chardonnay.

The Cote d'Or is divided into a northern and southern sector, called the Cote de Nuits and Cote de Beaune, respectively. Red wines are made in both areas, but virtually all the top-rated vineyards are located in the Cote de Nuits. The Cote de Beaune, unlike its northern neighbor, produces both red and

white Burgundies.

Germany is best known for he white wines, only a little red is made, but the best is from the Pinot Noir (Spatburgunder in German). Grown in such a northern latitude the wine is totally different from that found in Burgundy. It is a much lighter and more delicate wine, best consumed young.

The vine is also widely grown in northeastern Italy, mostly for blending, and a little is grown in Spain. Because of the greatness of the grape in Burgundy, it is grown in such diverse wine regions as Austria, Australia, South Africa,

Chile and so forth. The results generally have been inconsistent and mixed for the Pinot Noir is perhaps the most difficult of red grapes to manage.

The greatest of sparkling wines, Champagne, uses Pinot Noir as the critical red component of the blend. Pinot Noir accounts for the smallest acreage among the three Champagne grapes, but it is considered the most important of the three. Champagne is normally made from a cuvee (blend) consisting of about two-thirds black grapes, and the better producers prefer the Pinot Noir. An important use of the grape in Italy

is for the brut spumantes (dry sparkling wines).

California is an important producer of Pinot Noir; there are about 10,000 acres in the state, grown in all the major coastal counties. It has proven to be one of the most difficult of vines to handle in California and it is only in recent years that the winemakers felt that they were beginning to understand the grape, its growing requirements, and the winemaking techniques best suited to the variety.

One of the more exciting developments in American winemaking has been the success of Pinot Noir in the Pacific Northwest, particularly in Oregon. There are those who feel that these wines have come closer to the Burgundian originals than have their American predecessors.

Growth/Winemaking Techniques: Pinot Noir, unlike Cabernet Sauvignon, has resisted planting outside its traditional French home. The two reasons winemakers feel are the most compelling are the climate and the winemaking techniques, although many regard the soil and clonal selection to be critically important as well.

Burgundy is a cool region; for evidence we need look no further than the common practice of Chaptalizing the grape musts during fermentation in Burgundy. Chaptalization is the process of adding sugar to th fermenting grapes; it is done when the grapes do not attain sufficient sugar levels on their own. This is a fact of life in cool regions. In Germany and New York State, for example, the wines are routinely chaptalized. In Italy and California, it is not permitted, but that is only because it is not necessary. Where it is permitted it is done because good wines could not be consistently made without it. Little attention was paid in California to climate in early Pinot Noir plantings, but recently, the trend has been to replace vines in warmer regions and plant in cooler areas. Because of the diversity of microclimates in California, suitable areas have been identified in a variety of locations. One which has shown promise is the Cameros section of Sonoma and Napa; the southern end of both valleys which is adjacent to the cool and foggy San Francisco Bay.

Burgundian winemaking techniques have been much studied and emulated in recent years. Specifically, what has been found is that, in Burgundy, the grapes are often fermented with their stems, quite a different procedure from the normal process of de-stemming the grapes after picking. Another difference is that the Burgundian winemakers agitate or "work" the fermenting musts, frequently breaking the "cap" or solid mass at the top to

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