



V I B R A N T  
V E R M E N T I N O

WORDS DAN TRAUCKI

**V**ermentino has 41 different synonyms including the quaintly-named Favorita de Conegliano. It roughly translates to 'rabbit's favourite'. I wonder how it got that name?

The French call it Rolle in the Languedoc-Roussillon in southern France. According to *Which Winegrape Varieties Are Grown Where?* by Kym Anderson of the Adelaide University, there are 8,617 hectares of Vermentino in the world, mainly in Italy, and it is the 78th most planted grape variety on the planet.

The origins of Vermentino are clouded in mystery, partly because it has so many different names in the various places in Italy where it is grown. Some people think it originated on the Isle of Madeira in Spain, and was taken to Italy via Corsica by Ligurian sailors in the middle ages. Given that the variety mutates easily, it is unlikely this question will ever be solved. Today it is internationally recognised as being an Italian variety (other than by the Spaniards – surprisingly!).

There are five DOC (Denominazione di origine controllata) Vermentino zones in Italy, four of which are for straight varietal wines and one which makes blended. In France it is allowed in three AOC (Appellation d'origine Contrôlée) of which the Corsican Patrimonio is the only one for 100 percent Vermentino varietal wine, while in the other two it is allowed as a blending component in the local white wine.

Vermentino planting has been increasing lately in the USA, especially in the newer, lesser known grapegrowing areas such as Texas, North Carolina and in the Appalachian Mountains in Virginia, which is in addition to the existing plantings in California. In recent years Vermentino has also surfaced in Malta, Lebanon and Brazil as the whole world (other than Antarctica) becomes involved in grapegrowing and winemaking.

The latest edition of Darby Higgs' book, *Vinodiversity*, states there are 88 wineries in Australia growing Vermentino, spread throughout the land from the cooler areas such as the King Valley through to areas as warm as the Riverland and Sunraysia.

The variety was pioneered in Australia by Chalmers Wines, which released its first wine in 2004.

Vermentino is a mid-season ripening variety. This has less meaning these days, given the earlier and more compressed vintages Australia has been having. It is an early-budding variety, which makes it prone to spring frosts. It is also susceptible to downy mildew.

The wine is characterised by fresh citrus flavours of limes and lemons along with a big glob of green apples, crisp acidity and a solid structure. It usually has a big mouthful of fruit and a crisp, lingering finish which can have a hint of bitter almonds or a slight tang of saltiness. It is more at the savoury end of the flavour spectrum than the mainstream varieties, which can tend towards a hint of sweetness on the finish.

There are two distinctive styles of Vermentino emerging. Firstly, there is that of the Hunter which is very much in the Sardinian style, where the grapes are picked early so as to have lower alcohol and searing, racy acidity that makes a great wine to be enjoyed in summer with seafood. A great example of this style is Tallavera Grove Hunter Valley Vermentino 2013 with its 10.5 percent alcohol, racy acidity and hints of minerality.

In contrast there is the Riverland style of Vermentino from Salena Estate and 919 Wines, which are bigger with riper, fuller flavours – still crisp but with significantly less acidity than the Hunter style due to having been grown in a warmer climate and/or picked later. These are beautiful wines on their own or with food.

In between these two styles, the climate appears to play less of a part in determining the style of the wine than what the winemaker does. The timing of when to pick the ripe grapes – affecting of course the level of alcohol and acidity – seems to me to be the biggest style determining factors. Thus later picked from a cooler climate can look similar to an earlier picked wine from a warmer climate. Within this there is significant varietal 'trueness' and similarity, irrespective of where the grapes were

grown. This consistency will help the variety to establish itself with Aussie wine drinkers as they come to know what to expect of the wine when they buy a bottle, unlike with many other varieties such as Chardonnay where there is a whole raft of different styles and flavours.

Vermentino has made itself at home in McLaren Vale in a big way with such wines as Chalk Hill Vermentino 2014, with a hint of fruit sweetness to balance the acidity; the beautifully balanced and elegant Oliver's Taranga Vermentino 2014; and the uber-gluggable Hastwell & Lightfoot Vermentino 2014. They were all scrumptious and shining the beacon brightly for this fantastic variety.

Other notable SA Vermentinos were the ever so graceful Bremerton Langhorne Creek Vermentino 2014; the luscious Landaire Padthaway Vermentino 2014, which had beautiful orange blossom aromas on the fragrant bouquet; and Naked Wines' brilliantly named, light and bright, Rabbit & Spaghetti Clare Valley Vermentino 2014, by Adam Barton, which is a superb accompaniment for its namesake meal.

The Victorian contingent consisted of two stunners: Dalfarras Vermentino 2013, which had citrus bouquet bursting out of the glass and made the palate salivate – with the wine living up to the palate's expectation; and Calabria Vermentino 2013, which like every wine I have tasted from this talented Griffith winery, was full of flavour and smooth, well balanced and a pleasure to drink.

While this tasting was a bit SA centric, it wasn't for the lack of trying. Several other wineries didn't send in samples as requested, including two from Queensland, two from NSW and one from Victoria. A shame.

Vermentino makes lovely, consistent wines that we are going to see more and more. It makes crispy, flavoursome whites, powerful enough to accompany any antipasto, meze, tapas or most Mediterranean food dishes, making it ideally suited to our outdoor lifestyle.

DAN TRAUCKI is the wine consultant at Wine Assist – dan@wineassist.com.au ♦