

PETIT MANSENG IS ONE OF THE LESSER-PLANTED GRAPE VARIETIES IN THE WORLD. BUT THAT HASN'T STOPPED AUSTRALIAN WINE PRODUCERS HAVING A CRACK AT THE EXCITING VARIETY.

Many if not most Australian wine drinkers have heard of Petit Verdot, the ironically named, big flavoured French red variety that is becoming popular here due to its love of a warm climate. However, few drinkers have heard of Petit Manseng. This white variety is also from France, where it is grown mainly in the south. It can, if given sufficient TLC, produce high quality, interesting wines, both dry and sweet. The sweet wines made from Petit Manseng were revered in the 18th and 19th centuries by some of the royal houses of Europe.

According to *Which Wine Grape Varieties are Grown Where?* by Kym Anderson of Adelaide University, there are about 1,327 hectares of Petit Manseng in the world, making it one of the lesser-planted varieties. While there are no country-specific figures available, the majority is planted in its native France, where Petit Manseng is most prevalent in the southern regions of Languedoc and Juracon, and to a lesser extent in Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh where it is mainly used to make delicious sweet whites.

Elsewhere in the world, it has been present in Uruguay, in South America, since the earliest settlers, who brought it with them along with the deep, dark red variety, Tannat. More recently, it has started to be grown in California and a



few other non-traditional grapegrowing states in the USA like Ohio, Virginia and Georgia.

According to Darby Higgs' vinodiversity.com website, there are only 16 Petit Manseng producers in Australia, four of which are in the warm climate Riverland, five in the King Valley and Alpine Valley region of Victoria, and the others spread around in the Mornington Peninsula, Beechworth, Margaret River, Mudgee, New England and the Granite Belt in Queensland – that is, in cooler climates. I am unaware of any wineries producing the classic Pacherenc du Vic-Bilh style of sweet Petit Manseng. Hopefully it will come, as the resultant wines are sensational.

Symphonia Wines was the first to

had softened off significantly so the smooth, rich flavours explode on the palate in a delightful way, making it a truly memorable wine. The other cool climate wines tasted are similar in style with Marq 2014 Petit Manseng (Margaret River) and Toppers Mountain 2013 Petit Manseng (New England), both being great, lively, bright wines that just need time to show their full potential as the wine rounds out and the acidity softens, allowing the fruit flavours to shine through. Just one year's ageing makes quite a difference to this variety, as Toppers Mountain 2012 Petit Manseng demonstrates by being softer and smoother than the 2013, but still having that inherent crisp acidity on the palate and finish. Meanwhile, Chrismont 2012 Petit Manseng (King Valley), while

for this variety. The first wine, 2013, is lovely but has a good hint of sweetness on the palate. The 2014 swung quite a distance the other way, and was rather acid and austere, very similar to a cooler climate Petit Manseng. For the 2015, the pendulum swung back to the centre. The resultant wine was sensational, with enough ripeness to avoid the appearance of being strongly acidic and yet offering an alluring hint of fruit sweetness on the creamy, rich palate, without actually being sweet.

The other Riverlanders tasted were 2014 Bassham Petit Manseng and Whistling Kite 2014 Petit Manseng, both of which were good examples of the potential of this variety, if one has the patience to wait for a year or two before opening them. They both need time for the acidity to soften off, or alternatively, serve them now with food that needs a crisp, steely wine to go with it.

Every single wine tasted was a good, true example of the variety and well worth drinking. This is a rare occurrence at these tastings, where usually one or two (sometimes more) of the wines are out of varietal character or poorly made. It is then just a question of whether to drink your Petit Manseng young with food, or have the patience to wait so that the inherent acidity of the variety mellows and softens off, allowing the natural fruit flavours to better express themselves.

Whichever way you prefer your white wines, I suggest you search out a bottle of this interesting variety, which has great potential in Australia. I am convinced that over the next few years we will see much more Petit Manseng grown here, so if you try it now you'll be ahead of the curve. I am confident you won't be disappointed by Petit Manseng – *"the other Petit"*.

DAN TRAUCKI is a wine journalist and a wine industry consultant specialising in assisting with exports to Asian markets. Email dan@wineassist.com.au. ♦

“JUST ONE YEAR’S AGING MAKES QUITE A DIFFERENCE TO THIS VARIETY, AS TOPPERS MOUNTAIN 2012 PETIT MANSENG DEMONSTRATED BY BEING SOFTER AND SMOOTHER THAN THE 2013, BUT STILL HAVING THAT INHERENT CRISP ACIDITY ON THE PALATE AND THE FINISH.”

champion this variety when, in the early 1990s, pioneering owner Peter Read planted not only Petit Manseng (unheard of in Australia at the time) but also Pinot Grigio and Savagnin. The reds he planted were Tempranillo, Tannat and Saperavi – again, virtually unheard of at that time.

As with most other varieties, climate plays a significant role in the style of the wine. The tasting showed there are clearly two styles of dry Petit Manseng: those from cool climate and those from warm climate. The cool climate wines are steelier with more acid and tighter, needing time to soften and open up. A great example of this comes from Symphonia Wines (King Valley) – its 2013 is an excellent wine with a superb creamy mouthfeel, but is still tight and reserved. Symphonia 2008 Petit Manseng is just as creamy, but the acids

still having plenty of crisp acidity, has also developed lovely textural creaminess on the palate, making it appealing.

The warm climate Petit Manseng brigade were all from the Riverland. Incidentally, it was great to see that all of the Riverland samples tasted are organically grown. Petit Manseng from the Riverland's warmer climate is not quite as steely and flinty as it is from the cooler climes. Most of the Riverland wines have around one percent higher alcohol than most of those from cooler areas, which is obtained from riper fruit as a result of the warmer temperatures. The charge was led by 919 Wines (Berri), which sent a bottle of each of its last three vintages of Petit Manseng; they have been making it since 2009. This was a fascinating experience in seeing the evolution in the winemaking