

BERRY POSITIVE PINOT GRIS

April 7, 2014, by Annabelle Latz featured in Winepress April 2014



Flavour profiles available from the newest Pinot Gris clones are creating new enthusiasm about the variety within the New Zealand wine industry.

Out on the Secc vineyard, Lower Dashwood, viticulturist Jeremy Hyland and winemaker Jules Taylor say it is the flavour intensity of the clones M2, 52B, and 457 that has stimulated excitement and quality the industry hasn't seen before.

This brings new opportunities to growers and winemakers alike, which Jeremy Hyland describes as "head and shoulders above others that are available in New Zealand."

These 'new generation' clonal materials were brought to New Zealand by Riversun Nursery in Gisborne in 2003 and 2004. After spending two years in quarantine the first fruit of the ENTAV 457 and ENTAV 52(France) was picked in 2009, and a year later the first fruit of the M2, (Italy) (France) was picked.

"It's really that concentration aspect with the naturally smaller berries and more moderate yields," says Jeremy, comparing them to the older clones which often require extensive yield management.

For Jules Taylor Wines, this will be the third harvest of the M2 and 457 clones, and the fourth harvest of the 52B clone.

She says the natural physiology of the bunches create flavour intensity and diversity from the varying skin to pulp ratios, and minimal botrytis issues due to the loose bunches allowing air flow.

Waiting for the riper 'pear' characters of the grapes is what Jules and Jeremy aim for when choosing the harvesting time.

"Pinot Gris used to be every style, and was often about sugar level management," says Jeremy.

With fruit ripening now at lower brix levels, he says these clones give the ability to produce wines with more moderate alcohol levels.

"We are making Gris that has more concentration with a wider ranges of flavour and textures," says Jules, who likes to ferment blocks separately and blend together eventually.

Creating Pinot Gris wine at the drier end of the spectrum is also easier to match with a wider range of food dishes.

Jeremy says the development of the Pinot Gris clones follows the trend of Chardonnay clonal selection in Europe since the 1980's, which provided the industry with opportunities for working with fruit with better flavour potential.

"We just wanted to see some new stuff," said Jules, who is looking forward to seeing this year's fruit come in.

Riversun's Decisions Paying Off

Helping to keep the New Zealand wine industry up with the latest clonal selection trends overseas was the key motivating factor for Geoff Thorpe of Riversun Nursery when they imported the M2, ENTAV 52 and 457 Pinot Gris clones into New Zealand in 2003 and 2004.

No new imports of clones for almost a decade meant what was available to the industry was largely derived from an era where yield was the key clonal selection criteria. As a result, most of the older clones consisted of big tight bunches and berries, commonly leading to botrytis, sour rot and delayed ripening.

"These new clones were a real step change from everything else that had been brought in," says Geoff. With these three Pinot Gris clones in particular, the medium yields and smaller, looser bunches create flavours that have not been seen before in our industry. "Winemakers are saying they can really do something here which is much more likely to resonate with consumers," says Geoff.

A strong uptake of the clones since release is evidence that winemakers and grape growers are keen to create quality Pinot Gris, either by working solely with the new clones, or blending them with the older ones.

"I have heard some winemakers comment that in some years, making Pinot Gris with the high yielding older clones can be like trying to paint a picture with white paint, now they are saying they have some great colours to work with."

Between 2003 and 2010 Riversun Nursery imported 120 new varieties and clones to the industry.

Internationally, it is a fifteen-year process to officially register a new clone which Geoff says, “is clearly not for the faint hearted.”

While some in the industry argue that we should be doing our own clonal selection in New Zealand, Geoff believes that for now, we are probably best served by broadening our relatively narrow genetic and clonal base by accessing the very best available material from the four corners of the globe.

“Many of the new clones across all the main varieties are now showing their true potential out in commercial vineyards and wineries. We’ve now reached a sweet spot in the market...these clones will help us to re-define what we can do in the New Zealand vine and wine industry.”