

## Clones of Classic Varieties

# The Pinot Gris Portfolio

By Nick Hoskins and Geoff Thorpe

***An Australian winemaker once said, “Making Pinot Gris is like painting a picture using only white paint.”***

While some winemakers find it hard to muster much enthusiasm for this variety, consumers must beg to differ, for the popularity of Pinot Gris has grown almost exponentially over the past few years, and so, too, have plantings of this variety in New Zealand.

A mutation of Pinot Noir with greyish to coppery coloured fruit, Pinot Gris has a multitude of names: in France, it can also be called Tokay (Alsace), Pinot Beurot (Burgundy), and Malvoisie (Loire), while in Germany it's Grauburgunder or Grauer Burgunder (“Grey Burgundy”). The Italians, of course, call it Pinot Grigio.

In the Old World, Pinot Gris can produce wines of astonishing variety, ranging from a light, tart style reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc to the full-blown, richly perfumed offerings from Alsace. The Italian wines from Friuli are lighter, crisper, and fresher, and grapes in that region are typically picked before the variety's characteristically rapid loss of acid at full ripening.

In the New World, styles run the gamut, and many wines are given an extra heft with small additions of Gewürztraminer and/or Riesling. This lack of a recognisable “personality” can lead to disappointing purchases. Quality, too, has been inconsistent, but that doesn't seem to hinder consumers' relish for Gris/Grigio.

### Clonal History

Great Pinot Gris – no matter what style – relies on great clonal selection. The current workhorses in New Zealand vineyards largely stem from importations in the 1960s through the 1980s, although the “Mission selection” from old vines at Mission Estate dates back to the 1880s.

Some confusion persists around provenance: for example, the Barrie selection is often referred to as the “Mission clone” but it is believed to have been imported by Frank Berrysmith in 1962 from Wädenswil in Switzerland (accession number TK05338). Chris Barrie indicated that he collected the material from an old MAF Pinot Gris trial at the Mission vineyard in Green Meadows, which may account for the mix-up.

Lincoln Berrysmith (possibly the same as the Barrie selection) has been traced to MAF in Hastings and was planted by



*Pinot Grigio M2 selection at Riversun source block*

David Jackson at Lincoln University. And, just to confuse matters further, a heat-treated selection, known as PN00141, may originate from the Mission selection (although this remains unproven). Frank Berrysmith also brought in the Oville selection from Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1978.

The GM clones 2/15, 2/16, and 2/21, all from Geisenheim in Germany, were imported in 1982 by WINZ, and the late 1990s witnessed the arrival of heat-treated South African selections, including 7A and KVV 40A, brought in by the NZGVIG. Once again, provenance is a bit fuzzy: KVV 40A is possibly a heat-treated version of GM 2/15. These accessions more or less completed the New Zealand Pinot Gris portfolio – until Riversun imported several newer clones in 2003 and 2004.

### Changing styles in selection

In most New Zealand winegrowing regions, the older selections (including Barrie and Lincoln Berrysmith) typically produce medium-sized bunches and berries – although bunch architecture can often be tight, making vines prone to rots later in the season. The Mission selection, which has small bunches and berries, is also virused, and production is low and irregular, although it remains highly prized by some winemakers.

The Oville and Geisenheim range reflects a markedly different era in clonal selection when big bunches and berries and high yields were the order of the day. Not surprisingly,

these selections often start to fall apart later in the season, particularly after rainfall.

Newer clones reflect current preferences both for viticultural performance and flavours. All of the clones mentioned in this article (with the exception of Mission) are planted in adjacent rows at our Gisborne source block, and the comparisons between old and new are based on the data we have collected at the block since vines began bearing fruit in 2007.

Riversun imported three selections for this variety: ENTAV-INRA® Clone 52, ENTAV-INRA® Clone 457 and Italian Pinot Grigio M2. Of these, the latter two are vying for "Best in Show," presenting much looser bunch architecture with smaller bunches and berries, moderate yields and elevated flavours.

Pinot Grigio M2 is the first Italian selection to arrive in New Zealand (sourced for us by Alberto Antonini of Matura). Not surprisingly, M2 seems to deliver flavours and an acid balance more in keeping with the Grigio style. It was the standout performer in the first three years at the source block, both in terms of its viticultural performance and the micro-vins produced from 2007 through 2009. This selection shows the greatest propensity for variable fruit set, and thus has the most open bunch structure of the new imports. Bunch size also tends to be variable.

ENTAV-INRA® Clone 457 has also produced good micro-vins, and, in 2010, it showed more advanced ripeness, intensity of flavours and disease tolerance. With more than 150mm of rain in Gisborne at veraison this year, Mother Nature put all clones to the test.

The jury's still out on ENTAV-INRA® Clone 52. This is an older ENTAV-INRA® selection, but it was planted at the source block two years later than 457 and M2. Bunch and berry weights this year for Clone 52 were slightly heavier than for Pinot Grigio M2 and Clone 457, and 52's bunches were also tighter and more susceptible to rot. Nonetheless, a number of winemakers and viticultural consultants who visited our source block during vintage commented that they were impressed with its flavours.

They also commented on the elevated flavours offered by the new imports in comparison to all of the older selections. Descriptive words like "spice, pear, tokay, fig, and honeysuckle" were jotted down, along with "bright fresh citrus notes."

This year saw the first commercial harvest from ENTAV-INRA® Clone 457 and Pinot Grigio M2 from several Gisborne vineyards, generating genuine excitement amongst both growers and winemakers.

It remains to be seen how the new selections will perform in all of New Zealand's winegrowing regions, but we believe that Pinot Grigio M2 and ENTAV-INRA® Clone 457 show great potential. As one visitor commented, "When you compare the old and the new, there is no going back."

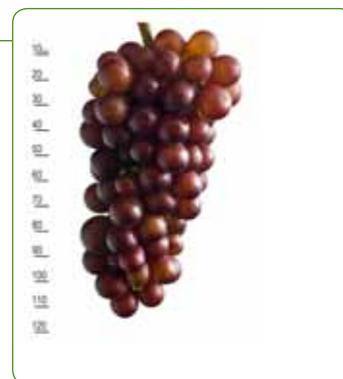
#### ENTAV-INRA® Clone 52

- Origin Germany (Baden)
- Selected for medium bunch and berry weights
- Moderate yields
- High sugar levels
- Producing fine and well-balanced wines in France
- More susceptible to sour rot and botrytis than 457 or M2 in Gisborne source block



#### ENTAV-INRA® Clone 457

- Origin: France (Burgundy)
- Selected for low to medium bunch and berry weights
- Moderate yields and slightly precocious (early to harvest)
- High sugar levels
- Producing fine and well-balanced wines in France



#### Pinot Grigio M2

- Origin: Northeastern Italy (selected by "flying winemaker" Alberto Antonini)
- Showing small to medium-sized bunches and berries with some hen and chicken formation
- Low to moderate yields, and slightly precocious (early to harvest)
- High sugar levels

