

# Wine Australia fact sheet

## White Wine - tasting notes



**Don't assume that if you've tasted Australian Chardonnay, that you have experienced the extraordinary diversity and quality of all that Australian white wine has to offer.**

Australia's white wines have a story to tell that's all their own, and it won't surprise you to learn that the winemakers who create them have a unique approach that sets their wines apart from the rest of the world.

When you look at it in the glass, a white Australian wine can be anything from opulent golden yellow – orange almost – to palest lemon yellow. The colour depends on the region it comes from (how cool or warm it is) and on the grape from which it was made; for example, Rieslings are paler than Chardonnays, and so on.

Colour can be a clue to the taste (the deeper it is, the richer the flavour) but a better indication comes from taking a big sniff. Swirl the glass round and sniff again. One thing you'll be sure of from Australia is that you will be smelling the product of well grown and fully ripened grapes.

Delicious, concentrated ripe fruit, harvested in perfect conditions is easier to obtain in Australia than almost anywhere else in the world. Beyond this it is difficult to generalise, so different are the aromas, flavours and taste

sensations that come from each of the grapes, blends and regions.

### Chardonnay

This classic grape variety first came to Australia in the late 1920s but it wasn't until the 1970s that it became the most widely planted variety in the country.

The peak of its fame came in the 1980s and looking back, the critics now classify some of those wines for being "oaky" and unsubtle, but to tell the truth, people loved them. Pick up a bottle today and you will discover Australian Chardonnay to be consistently well made, often with a hint of vanilla/oak flavours and plenty of ripe, melon/grapefruit to ripe peach fruit. From warmer inland regions (Murray Darling, Riverland, Riverina) they will often exhibit tropical fruit flavours. Whilst from the coolest regions, such as Tasmania, Adelaide Hills and Mornington Peninsula the characters will be much more subtle with citrus (grapefruit and lime characters) predominating.

The Yarra Valley, Margaret River and Coonawarra all produce wonderful Chardonnay examples that show fruit richness and complexity. In truth, Chardonnay is Australia's most versatile white wine grape, as evidenced by outstanding examples from the coolest to the warmest regions.

### Chenin Blanc

Chenin Blanc is a favourite with growers over in Western Australia with the Swan Valley and the Peel regions particularly well suited. It's apple flavours and crisp acidity can fare well in hands of the right winemaker – or after a few years in the right cellar.

### Colombard

Although often blended with Chardonnay and sometimes Sauvignon Blanc, on its own Colombard produces a full-bodied wine with good acidity.

Regionally examples to seek out include Adelaide Plains and Murray Darling. It is a grape variety that generally does better in warmer climates.

### Gewurztraminer

Growers are in two minds about Gewurztraminer, do we or don't we? Try out some of the versions from Clare Valley, Great Southern or Tasmania and you'll agree they definitely should.

Spicy lychee, Turkish delight and floral flavour predominate; add to this Gewurztraminer's distinctive rich mouth texture, and you have the ideal wine compliment for the spicy flavours of Thai, Chinese and even Indian cuisine.

### Marsanne

Although much-admired in the Rhône wines of southern

France, Marsanne is a variety that only really received its fully due praise in Australia.

It is particularly good in the Goulburn and Yarra Valleys (Victoria). Basically, it's like Chardonnay and Semillon but more so. More honeyed, more peachy, more spicy and there's just a little more lemony acidity, too, which saves this grape from luscious overkill. As with its cousins from the Rhone, you won't see too many of these wines around but if you spot a bottle, grab it, it'll be worth trying.

### Muscat

In Australia, as elsewhere, this variety's greatest triumph is with its sweet wines.

Grown in the Rutherglen district of Victoria, fully ripened grapes are harvested, then are partially fermented and (traditionally) left to mature in barrels. The result? Heaven! Dessert wine of almost ambrosial concentration and never without a tingling tang of acidity to balance it.

The Muscats from north-east Victoria are truly one of Australia's "gifts" to the world of wine.

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## Pinot Grigio / Pinot Gris

Australian Pinot Grigio/Pinot Gris is another fairly recent arrival that is starting to develop a strong following worldwide. This should be no surprise, as its Alsace cousin, Riesling, has been an Aussie star for several decades.

It comes in two main styles, each equally fashionable: fresh, crisp, unwooded and simple (ideal for hot summer day drinking), and later-picked spicier, richer wine (delicately buttery) which keeps a treat in the cellar.

Victoria's Mornington Peninsula and Great Western regions and the State of Tasmania all produce stunning examples of this now popular variety.

## Riesling

Unlike their European counterparts, Australian Rieslings are generally made in dry styles. The result is another international gem, which due to their crisp fruit and acid balance are a perfect food accompaniment.

Riesling also has an ability to mature with age as well as delight with its youthful freshness. Look out for examples from the Clare or Eden Valleys of South Australia which develop this grape's classic honey and citrus characters.

There are more fine examples of Rieslings from Western

Australia's Great Southern region (great complexity), from Tasmania (crisp and perfumed) and the Barossa Valley (more rounded and full-flavoured).

Riesling is also responsible for some of Australia's greatest sticky sweet dessert wines. They're either made with a touch of that benevolent mould botrytis or harvested when all the berries have dried and shrivelled on the vines in late autumn. In either case, the perfumed rich intensity of these wines, still with their racy acidity, is little short of magnificent.

## Sauvignon Blanc

Australian Sauvignon Blanc is a variety which is both fast-growing in popularity and increasing plantings.

As elsewhere in the world, it is a variety which shows its best when grown in cooler wine regions.

Australia's huge diverse landmass provides the perfect growing conditions for this classic variety in several of its regions.

Yarra Valley, Adelaide Hills, Margaret River, Orange in New South Wales and Tasmania, are all regions which produce wonderfully expressive Sauvignon Blanc.

In the coolest regions and vintages, these vines have "grassy", gooseberry characters, whereas, in slightly

warmer vintages passionfruit flavour with a zing of acidity, are more typical.

In Margaret River, Sauvignon Blanc is often blended with Semillon which creates a perfect partnership and fuller palate style.

## Semillon

Semillon is one of the very best grapes for demonstrating the different characters emerging from Australia's varied wine regions.

Start with Semillon from the Barossa Valley to get a glimpse of this grape at its most luscious. Deep yellow in aromas of peaches and mangoes fill the nose and in the glass the flavours will continue the theme – with added vanilla (Barossa Semillon is often wood-aged like Chardonnay).

Semillon from the Hunter Valley is another matter altogether. It's a lean, rather pale-looking wine that seems to have little more than flintiness in its favour. Give it a few years in bottle, however, and as if from nowhere it turns into a honeyed, nutty, complex classic. Go west and Margaret River's versions are a fine balance between these two styles, and they age well too. Find a Semillon from anywhere in Australian and you'll almost certainly be able to distinguish it by its warm, peachy character, whether it be a simple regional blend, a

sweet botrytised wine from the Riverina of New South Wales.

## Verdelho

Verdelho as a varietal still wine is a success story the Aussies can claim as their own.

It originally arrived in the country for the purpose of making intensely sweet fortified wines, just as it does on the island of Madeira. However, when bottled as a still table wine (unfortified) the winemakers of Australia found they'd hit on something really special.

Nutty/savoury in character it makes a striking contrast to the voluptuous style of, say, a Chardonnay or Semillon but yet isn't quite as tangy as Sauvignon Blanc.

Look out for this variety in Western Australia, the Hunter Valley and increasingly in South Australia.



Wine Australia

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## Viognier

Acclaimed for the stunning whites it makes in the Rhône, this grape is set for more success in Australia than it's ever received so far.

Truth is, it's tricky to grow, however, in Victoria's Mornington Peninsula and the Eden Valley and McLaren Vale of South Australia, several vineyards have certainly cracked it. Like Chardonnay, Australian Viognier is also great when matured or fermented in oak barrels.

## Sparkling White Wine

Sparkling Australian wine comes in all shapes, sizes and hues.

White versions vary from everyday fizz, full of fruit and fun, to top-notch traditionally made (fermented in the bottle) true classics.

Not surprisingly, the cool regions of Australia are producing outstanding base material for these quality wines: Tasmania and the Yarra Valley being amongst the best.

## Sweet White Wine

Australia's 'sticky' wines fall into three groups:

1. Late-harvest wines: Semillon, Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Sauvignon Blanc.
2. Fortified Tawny and Muscat: Australian tawnies are made from red grapes and are

usually far more "fruit expressive" than those from elsewhere. Rutherglen Muscats ) are classified as either 'classic', 'grand' or 'rare' (the richest of the lot). These are about the most intensely sticky, 'toffee-ish' pudding wines you're ever likely to experience.

3. Botrytis affected styles: these wines are affected by botrytis cinerea, a fungus which shrivels the grape and makes them sweet and juicy. Look out for Semillon and Riesling examples.

## White Wines For Aging

No, it isn't just reds that you can age in your cellar for optimum later enjoyment. Australia's finest whites - Rieslings, Semillons and top Chardonnays - are worth cellaring too. In most cases, you'll be able to drink these wines early if you want to but it's just that you might benefit from a little more complexity of flavour in your glass if you wait a while.

## White Wine Vintages

Australia's sunshine quota is higher than most but its weather does vary from year to year. These are the best of recent white wine vintages (particularly important to note if you're looking for a wine to age in your cellar): 2002, 2000, 1999, 1996, 1994.

