

# Wine Australia fact sheet

## White Wine - The taste of Australia



### **If there is a wine that sums up the Australian personality of sun, surf and lifestyle it is Australian Chardonnay.**

Since Australian Shiraz became the red wine of choice for the world's wine consumers, it seems the Great Aussie White that started it all in the early 1990s has been forgotten.

But most of today's wine consumers started their vinous journey with a glass of Australian Chardonnay and more than likely it came from a bottle marked Jacob's Creek or Lindemans Bin 65.

These two brands alone carved a bow wave through the United Kingdom and United States from the late 1980s and introduced consumers to varietal labelling and flavour.

Much of this Chardonnay came from the warm inland regions of Australia such as Griffith in New South Wales, Mildura in Victoria and the Riverland in South Australia. With more than two-thirds of their growing seasons bathed in brilliant warmth and abundant supplies of fresh water, Chardonnay really did have the taste of the Australian landscape.

Of course, perceiving Australian Chardonnay as a popular, consumer-friendly wine underrates the elegant Chardonnays from the Margaret River region of Western Australia, the Adelaide Hills in South

Australia, Cowra in New South Wales, Tasmania, and the Yarra Valley in Victoria. These regions produce outstanding Chardonnays where the altitude and a cool climate intensifies fruit flavours and acid structures - and progressive winemaking techniques such as barrel fermentation in French oak - add texture and depth.

Australians have also perfected their own sparkling Chardonnay-Pinot Noir methode champenoise blend, with the best examples appearing from the cool highlands of Tasmania.

However, it's worth putting on record, that winemakers had been producing Australian white wines for several generations before Chardonnay was even planted.

The nation's first white wine boom was actually kick started by a carbonated Riesling - Barossa Pearl. Although the skittle shaped bottle is now seen as 1960s kitsch, the wine which was developed by Orlando's Colin Gramp, introduced a whole generation of Australians to wine.

It also inspired and encouraged a small band of white wine pioneers to keep the faith. People such as John Vickery, Jim Irvine, Jim Barry and Tim Knappstein who introduced technology such as refrigeration and cold stabilisation to retain the flavours and freshness of Australian Riesling.

Regionality also plays a role in defining the specific characteristics of Australian white wine. The Clare Valley of South Australia with its high altitude and rolling, cool hills became the perfect micro-climate for crisp, citrus-scented Riesling - wonderful fruit driven wines with clean finishing acidity. It is now world famous for this style which is unique to Australia.

Other regions such as Eden Valley in South Australia, Great Southern in Western Australia and the "southern alps" in Victoria and central Tasmania provide variations in terms of acidity and depth of flavour, but they all capture the lemony-lime essence of a fine Riesling - the perfect accompaniment to seafood. It is also rare now to discover an Australian Riesling under cork, as most producers have found that the inert atmosphere created by a screw cap will ensure the delicate flavours persist.

Another traditional variety that has earned a regional reputation for excellence is Hunter Valley Semillon. The high rainfall micro-climate both challenges winemakers yet nurtures the intensity of flavours and acid levels to provide wines of great richness and longevity - many Hunter Semillons are still fresh and alive after 40 years in bottle. A slightly rounder style of Semillon comes from the warmer Barossa and inland Griffith makes luscious

botrytised styles. Australians have also brought together the unique characteristics of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc and particularly those from Margaret River in Western Australia exude the freshness of a cool summer breeze.

As winemakers have explored the wine world they have returned with new visions and dreams. Viognier is well suited to some of the warmer regions of Australia such as the Barossa, and also thrives in cool climates like Mornington in Victoria and Eden Valley in South Australia. Pioneering work undertaken in the past 10 years has enabled Viognier to emerge as Australia's new white varietal and its rich, apricot flavours are now popular with consumers - and winemakers who wish to spice up their Shiraz.

Other varieties are finding their way to Australia, especially Pinot Gris/Grigio, which is rapidly becoming the Chardonnay of the 21st century.

But for most consumers, Australian white will always be the quintessential varietals Chardonnay, Riesling and Semillon - downunder sunshine in a bottle.



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