

Pinot Noir



Origin

Pinot Noir is the oldest cultivated grape variety in our latitude. Its age has been estimated as at least two thousand years. It originated from a cross between a wild form of *Vitis vinifera* subsp. *sylvestris* and a cultivated variety that may have reached Burgundy by means of the Greeks or Romans. Whether it is identical to the *Vitis allobrogica* that was famous with the Romans, which was mentioned in the first century AD, remains a presumption. The Allobroges were a Celtic tribe in Gaul that settled between the Rhône and the Isère. In Burgundy itself, the variety was called Noirien [“black”]. In the year 884, the Burgundy grape was to reach Lake Constance with the name “Clävner”. In the fourteenth century, the variety also became known under the name “Klebroth” in the Rheingau. Because of the long tradition of cultivation, an abundance of synonyms came into existence in the various areas. Since 1894, the variety has been known in French as Pinot Noir, which has carried over into English. In Alto Adige as well as in Austria, the German term “Blauburgunder” established itself, while Italian follows the French model with Pinot Nero. Out of the original grape variety, a multitude of new varieties (Pinot Blanc, Pinot Grigio, Pinot Noir Précoce, Pinot Meunier) and clones have been formed. Thus out of the cross of Gouais Blanc with Pinot, at least sixteen grape varieties have originated, including Chardonnay, Gamay, Aligoté, and Auxerrois. Lagrein and Gewürztraminer are also related to Pinot Noir. The first experiments with Pinot Noir in Alto Adige were carried out around 1835, and with other sources around Bolzano around 1840. Plantings then followed in Bressanone and especially around Ramez Castle in Merano (1863-64). In Egna and Appiano, as well, the variety was already being cultivated at that time, but up until

the First World War, the demand for Pinot Noir was rather low, most likely because of the weakness of its yields at that time. After the war, though, it produced red wines of appreciable quality.

Distribution

Throughout the world, the area of cultivation is presently increasing slightly. At 118,300 hectares (292,326 acres), this variety is in the top ten of worldwide variety rankings. The most important country for cultivation is France with nearly 32,300 hectares (79,074 acres), of which a third each are found in Burgundy and Champagne. In second place is the USA with 25,000 hectares (61,779 acres). Germany, where the variety is continuing to gain in importance, has 12,000 hectares (29,653 acres). New Zealand has the highest rates of growth and is now at 8,000 hectares (20,000 acres). It is followed by Moldova (7,000 hectares/17,000 acres), Australia (5,000 hectares/12,000 acres) and also Italy (5,000 hectares/12,000 acres), ahead of Switzerland (4,140 hectares/10,230 acres). In Italy, there is Lombardy with 3,300 hectares (8,200 acres) clearly the most important Pinot Noir area. The variety is cultivated there above all in the Oltrepò Pavese, although the wines that are made there are less well known. In Alto Adige, 600 hectares (1,483 acres) are planted with Pinot Noir, followed by Trentino (375 hectares/927 acres) and Friuli (170 hectares/420 acres). And in other regions of Italy (Piemonte, Val d’Aosta, Tuscany, and even Sicily), wine-growers venture with this variety that is far from easy. Cultivation in Alto Adige is concentrated in Oltradige, or in more precise terms, the winegrowing locations of Appiano and

Caldaro. On the west-facing slopes of the Bassa Atesina, especially in Montagna, Egna, Merano and Salorno and Val Venosta, the variety thrives well.

As early as 1960, there were around 150 hectares (371 acres) producing in the province. By 1990, the area of cultivation had increased slightly to 217 hectares (536 acres), but after that it grew significantly. Thus in 2000, there were already 263 hectares (650 acres) being cultivated, a figure that grew to today's 600 hectares (1,483 acres).

Vines

The dark to violet-blue bunches are small to medium-sized, cylindrical in shape, and have a medium-early maturity. Because of their rather thin-skinned grapes and the tight-berried structure of the bunches, they are susceptible to rot. Through planting in well-ventilated locations and the choice of clones with a looser berry structure, the attempt has been made to alleviate these cultivation problems. The growing of clones in Germany and France has especially achieved progress with this variety; for instance, a low to medium yield potential, a lower susceptibility to rot, and a more multilayered aroma spectrum. From the very start, producers of this grape have recognized that the variety is best suited to cultivation in medium-high hilly areas starting from 400 meters (1,300 feet) above sea level. If, however, it is planted higher than 800 meters (2,600 feet) above sea level, then the wines lack their necessary fullness. The demanding cultivation and vinification of this variety has put the brakes on a further expansion of the planted area, even though sufficient suitable locations would be available. The corresponding type of soil clearly shapes the character of Pinot Noir. Under warmer conditions, the soil may be somewhat heavier, while in cooler locations, it may be lighter. The amount of soil skeleton, especially that which is made of limestone, brings along advantages in the expression of the wine. In contrast to other red wine varieties, the grapes on the vines must not have too great an exposure to the sun in order to maintain the desired fresh aromatic quality. The west-facing location of Mazzon, situated at around 400 meters (1,300 feet) in elevation above Egna, has especially distinguished itself as a contiguous cultivation area for Pinot Noir.

Wine

Pinot Noir wines are captivating as a result of their elegance. The variety is characterized by multilayered aromas of berries (raspberries, blackberries, and cherry jam, as well as lingonberries and bilberries), as well as tones of plums, violets, and cloves. The powerful ruby-red experiences slight brownish tones with an overripe harvest or after a longer aging of the wine. Vinification in wood has generally won out with the better-quality selections. Pinot Noir wines are bottled in Alto Adige with a maximum of three grams of residual sugar. Amongst expert circles, it is undisputed that the most favorable conditions for Pinot Noir in all of Italy are to be found in Alto Adige. Both in the neighboring province of Trento and in the Val d'Aosta, where similar climatic conditions prevail, noteworthy Pinot Noir wines are also produced. A small part of local production goes to the making of sparkling wine.