

Merlot



Origin

The variety originated in Bordeaux and is based upon a cross between Madeleine Noire de Charentes and Cabernet Franc. In Tyrol, Merlot was recommended in 1886 after ten years of cultivation at the research center of San Michele all'Adige. But only starting in 1920 did the variety achieve a certain importance at lower elevations (in contrast to Cabernet Sauvignon). The fact that the variety was uncomplicated to cultivate with high yields and good sugar levels contributed to its spread.

Distribution

Over the past decades, Merlot has developed into a worldwide variety, and today, with a total area of cultivation of 268,000 hectares (662,242 acres), it is in second place, just slightly behind Cabernet Sauvignon. The leading position is held by France with 115,000 hectares (284,171 acres), although the area only increased rapidly here after 1970. It is followed by the USA with 44,000 hectares (108,726 acres) and Italy with 29,000 hectares (71,661 acres). There are also considerable areas of cultivation in Spain (16,000 hectares/40,000 acres), Chile and Romania with 12,000 hectares (30,000 acres) each, Bulgaria and Australia with 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) each, and China and South Africa with 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres) each. In Italy, Merlot is found in all regions. In that regard, the Veneto has dedicated itself in particular to this variety (10,000 hectares/24,710 acres), followed by Sicily (5,000 hectares/12,355 acres). The areas of cultivation in Tuscany and Friuli (3,000 hectares/7,413 acres each) are followed by Umbria, Puglia, Lazio and Lombardy (1,200-1,500 hectares/2,965-3,707 acres each) In Alto Adige after World War II, an increase to nearly 50 hectares (124 acres) was recorded. Between 1998

and 2008, a further climb took place, from 74 to 243 hectares (183 to 600 acres). Today, 197 hectares (487 acres) are planted with the variety. One third of the area of cultivation is located in the communities of Caldaro and Appiano.

Vines

The medium-sized bunches are frequently shouldered, with loose berries and a cylindrical shape. The likewise medium-sized berries have a thin skin and a blackish-blue color. In Alto Adige, the locations to which the variety is best adapted are located at the foot of the slopes in the Adige Valley on soils with a moderately heavy skeleton. Starting at an elevation of 350 meters (1,150 feet) above sea level, the variety hardly produces any more wines with the desired body and smoothness. The area of Settequerce (Terlano) and the lower mountainsides of Magrè, Cortaccia, and Termeno are particularly predestined for Merlot.

Wine

Only fully ripened grapes yield powerful, dark red wines with soft tannins. The spectrum of aromas ranges between blackberries, black currants, plum compote, and different spices. Bell pepper is regarded as a sign of a lack of harmony in the glass. Vinification in wood is standard for the production of quality wines. And when blended with other dark wines (Cabernet or Lagrein), Merlot can provide the desired roundness and smoothness. The lack of a prominent fan base for this variety and its good blending properties lead to the fact that not very much single varietal Merlot wine is made in Alto Adige.