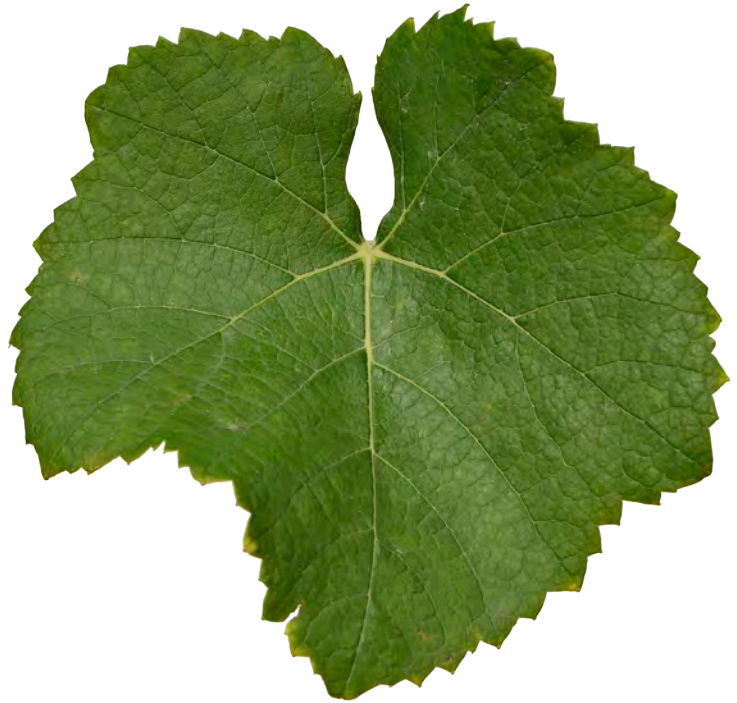


Pinot Blanc



Origin

The precise point in time of its coming into existence is unknown, but it is presumed to be the fourteenth century. Pinot Blanc originated from a mutation of Pinot Noir, the original variety of the Burgundy grapes but also the starting point for many other European vines. Aside from the color of the grapes, the actual Burgundy varieties (Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, and Pinot Noir) are hardly distinguishable in ampelographic terms.

The variety has been mentioned in Alsace with the name “Clevner” since the middle of the sixteenth century. Two different variations of Pinot Blanc are differentiated there, namely Gros Pinot Blanc, where produces higher yields, and the small-bunched, genuine Pinot Blanc from Burgundy. Starting out from Alsace, Pinot Blanc spread into the nearby Rhineland Palatinate and also to Baden.

For a long time, Pinot Blanc vineyards were planted in a mixture with Chardonnay and the grape was not perceived as a separate variety. Chardonnay was regarded as a variant of Pinot Blanc. Even though Chardonnay has been described as a separate grape variety since 1872, the precise differentiation between the two varieties only took hold worldwide after 1970. And in Alto Adige, there were the so-called “green” and “yellow” Pinot Blancs in the vineyards up until 1985. Only after that point were the two varieties systematically differentiated and correctly designated not only in the statistics, but also in the vine nurseries. As a result of the centuries-old mixing, the history of the variety ought to be spoken of in a logically consistent manner as simply “white” Burgundy.

The first planting of Pinot Blanc in Alto Adige demonstrably took place in 1852 in Bressanone. Additional vineyards were then planted in Nalles, Appiano, Terlano, and Marleno. After his good experiences in Styria, Archduke Johann presumably brought the variety into his Tyrolean vineyards in Appiano-Monte and Scena around 1850 along with Pinot Grigio. The wine designation “Strahler”, which was originally a blend of Pinot Blanc and Pinot Grigio, but then also additionally contained Riesling and Sylvaner, originates from the fact that at the time, these varieties were cultivated in a new growth training system: a low trellis support. The expression “Stareben” was a description in the local dialect for a low, single post training system, and later the cultivation with a low Guyot trellis. White Burgundy wines were already found in the province as early as on the occasion of the fruit exhibitions with wine tastings in 1864, 1867, and 1872 as forerunners of the “Bolzano Wine Tasting Festival”, which became an annual event starting in 1896. The variety went on to also spread to Andriano, Caldaro, Termeno, Magrè, Salorno, and Bolzano. As early as a hundred years ago, the variety was consequently cultivated throughout the entire winegrowing region of Alto Adige.

Distribution

With a total cultivated area of 16,000 hectares (40,000 acres), the variety does not play a special role either throughout Europe or throughout the world in comparison to Pinot Grigio or Chardonnay. The lead is held by Germany with a planted area of 5,800 hectares (14,332 acres). Pinot Blanc is popular especially in Baden, Rheinhessen, and Rhineland Palatinate, and the areas of cultiva-

tion are even growing slightly. These are followed by Italy with 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres), whereby the Veneto with its 1,000 hectares (2,471 acres) takes the leading position, followed with a significant distance by Friuli (650 hectares/1,606 acres), Alto Adige (610 hectares/1,507 acres), Emilia-Romagna (450 hectares/1,112 acres), and Lombardy (170 hectares/420 acres). In neighbouring Trentino there are only 69 hectares (170 acres).

The cultivation of Pinot Blanc is decreasing slightly in Italy in favor of Chardonnay. The variety has achieved a slightly increasing importance in Austria, where nearly 2,000 hectares (4,900 acres) are planted today. In France, its land of origin, the variety only appears to be appreciated any more in Alsace. Out of the 1,232 hectares (3,044 acres) that are planted with it throughout the country, 1,200 of them (2,965 acres) are located in that region. In Alsace, the wine designation "Pinot Blanc" also includes the variety Auxerrois, thus resulting in a total of 3,260 hectares (8,056 acres) in the statistics. Chardonnay has displaced Pinot Blanc from earlier areas of cultivation such as Champagne or Burgundy. In Europe, the variety still plays a subordinate role in the Czech Republic (900 hectares/2,224 acres), Russia (700 hectares/1,730 acres), Slovenia, Slovakia (800 hectares/1,977 acres), Moldova, and Ukraine. Overseas, there are hardly any areas worthy of mention: the USA, for example, currently has only 262 hectares (647 acres) under cultivation.

The first survey after World War II, which was carried out in 1965, showed an area of cultivation in Alto Adige of 445 hectares (1,100 acres). Thus Pinot Blanc was long regarded as the province's most important white wine variety. In subsequent years, a continuous increase occurred up to 624 hectares (1,542 acres). But after Chardonnay began to be measured separately for the first time in 1985, the level of Pinot Blanc in the statistics shrank to a modest 154 hectares (381 acres). In later years, the area of cultivation dropped even further. But the variety went on to once again find more popularity, and thus by 2023, some 593 hectares (1,465 acres) were planted with it. The most important communities where it is grown are Appiano, Caldaro, Terlano, Termeno and Renon, but today, the variety is represented in nearly all of the wine growing communities.

Vines

The medium-sized, mostly shouldered bunches have tight berries and are greenish-yellow up to their medium-early maturity. Because of their compact grape structure, the variety is especially suited to training on Guyot trellises. Pinot Blanc shows its characteristic properties especially well in well-ventilated, high-elevation locations up to 800 meters (2,600 feet). Even at these higher locations, the variety provides satisfactory yields. The wines show a sleek acidity structure. Alto Adige is thus especially well suited to the cultivation of this variety. Even though Chardonnay and Pinot Blanc get more attention on the international level, the latter is comparatively more appreciated in Alto Adige.

Wine

Pinot Blanc derives its vivaciousness from its lively play of acidity and shows itself as a wine characterized by juiciness and, at times, a mineral-rich quality. The spectrum of aromas ranges from those of apples, pears, and lemons to pineapples and rarely even apricots. Tones of hay blossoms, hazel nuts, and almonds contribute to the complexity. Thanks to the regulation of yields, the wines also demonstrate the desired fullness of body. Pinot Blanc is also used for the production of sparkling wine in Alto Adige and also in the rest of Italy, although to a decreasing degree.