

Sauvignon Blanc



Origin

Although English has taken on the French name, in the German-speaking world neither the direct translation “Weißer Sauvignon” nor the synonym that is common in Styria, Slovenia, and Croatia of “Muskat-Sylvaner” ever really took hold. Instead, it is normally referred to there simply as Sauvignon. The variety came into existence through a chance cross between Traminer and Chenin Blanc, presumably in Southwestern France. In Bordeaux, a blend of it and Sémillon yields a renowned white wine. It has only been mentioned since the eighteenth century, but it must be substantially older, since the variety represents a parent of Cabernet Sauvignon. The first recommendation for planting in the Adige Valley took place in 1886 through the research center in San Michele. After a ten-year trial cultivation, it was reported that the variety can bring forth “highly fine” wines on the Adige. After that, it must have been planted in Terlano, but the only moderate yield slowed down its further spread.

Distribution

For a long period of time, the variety was cultivated predominantly in France. Exceptions were formed by Styria, Slovenia, and California, where Sauvignon Blanc likewise already had a certain significance early on. Starting from 1980, its worldwide bandwagon of success then began. Today, after a rapid spread throughout the world, with an area of cultivation of 123,000 hectares (303,940 acres) it is the third most important white wine variety overall. With 31,000 hectares (76,603 acres), France

does indeed still hold the leading position, but New Zealand has massively gained ground and already has over 21,000 hectares (51,892 acres). They are followed by Chile (15,000 hectares/37,000 acres), South Africa (10,000 hectares/25,000 acres), Moldova (9,000 hectares/22,000 acres), and the USA and Australia with 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres) each. Within Europe, there are also significant planted areas in Romania (6,000 hectares/15,000 acres), Ukraine (5,000 hectares/12,000 acres), and Spain (4,000 hectares/10,000 acres) ahead of Italy (3,500 hectares/9,000 acres). The order of Italian regions is Friuli (1,300 hectares/3,200 acres) ahead of Veneto (600 hectares/1,500 acres), Alto Adige (497 hectares/1,228 acres), Sicily (300 hectares/700 acres), and Trentino (127 hectares/314 acres). And in Alto Adige, the aromatic white wine variety only really gained a foothold after 1980. In 1990, only 27 hectares (66 acres) were planted with the variety, but by 1998, that figure was already up to 82 hectares (202 acres). Sauvignon Blanc experienced an even greater ascent over the past ten years, with the distribution climbing during that period from 160 hectares (395 acres) to the current state of 497 hectares (1,228 acres). Today, the main focus of Sauvignon Blanc cultivation is found in Appiano, Caldaro, Terlano, Cortaccia and Bolzano.

Vines

The size of the bunches differs depending upon the clone, but in general they are rather small, compact, and short-stemmed. The small to medium-sized berries are golden-yellow. With too vigorous growth or poor weather during blossoming, the variety

is inclined toward blossom drop. Maturity is medium-early. Initially, Sauvignon Blanc was planted in Alto Adige primarily at the foot of slopes that were too warm. In order to maintain the desired aromatic quality and acidity, it had to be harvested very early there. For that reason, the cultivation was gradually pushed up toward medium-high elevations of up to 600 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level. But the late lignification at elevations that are too high holds the risk of damage during the winter. If the grapes have too much exposure to the sun, then they lose their desired aromas. The variety can best display its qualities in west-facing locations, but east-facing ones are not to be ruled out. If Sauvignon Blanc grows on lime gravel soils, they provide it with the additional fruity to mineral-rich tones.

Wine

Nearly every winery in Alto Adige has come to occupy itself with this variety. A large selection of different clones is available. The initial use of selections from our own research center in Laimburg with prominent aromas that are characteristic of the variety favor the development. The stylistic direction of the wine has changed since the first planting boom. At that time, Sauvignon Blanc showed itself to be grassy and vegetal, with tones of stinging nettles, green bell peppers, and beans. Today, on the other hand, it is aromas of passion fruit, gooseberries, elder blossoms, and black currants that dominate. The stylistic direction that is sought after by various wine producers differs greatly. The location and the clone that is selected, but also the care of the vines all contribute to these differences. The straw-yellow wines are commonly drunk very young. That also corresponds to the typology of the wines with their rather lean body. Sauvignon Blanc wines are often supported by their acidity, which is why aromas of citrus are commonly to be recognized. A careful vinification in wood can lend the wines more complexity.