

Cabernet



Origin

The two varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc are described here together since they are often not listed separately on labels. And the designation of origin under wine regulations for Alto Adige makes it possible to use only the designation “Cabernet”.

Cabernet Franc is the older of the two varieties, and in fact, Cabernet Sauvignon came into existence as a cross between Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc. In addition, Cabernet Franc crossed with Gros Cabernet also led to the Carménère variety. In Italy, it was only recognized rather late that the supposed Cabernet Franc plantings in the Veneto and in Friuli were in reality actually Carménère, which also originated from Southwestern France. In Alto Adige, too, the initial small plantings were also affected by this mix-up. Cabernet Franc was already known in the Bordeaux area for a long time and must have originated in the Spanish Basque region. Cabernet Sauvignon, on the other hand, first appeared in the Bordelais area starting from the fourteenth century. Both Cabernet varieties were spread in Alto Adige by the research center in San Michele, even though individual wine-growing pioneers had already been experimenting with both of the varieties since 1840. But large vineyards did not come into existence until around 1880 in Merano and Egna.

Distribution

While Cabernet Sauvignon has risen to the worldwide number one variety with 341,000 hectares (842,629 acres), Cabernet Franc has managed only 54,000 hectares (133,000 acres), while Carménère, which today is widespread only in Chile (11,000 hectares/27,000 acres), in China (7,000 hectares/17,000 acres), and on the decrease in Italy (estimated at 2,000 hectares/5,000 acres), for a total of around 22,000 hectares (54,000 acres) The leader is France (Cabernet Sauvignon 54,000 hectares/133,000 acres, Cabernet Franc 36,000 hectares/89,000 acres), followed by China with 60,000 hectares (148,000 acres) and then Chile (43,000 hectares/106,000 acres) and the USA (41,000 hectares/101,000 acres, almost exclusively Cabernet Sauvignon) ahead of Spain (20,000 hectares/49,000 acres), Argentina (15,000 hectares/37,000 acres), and South Africa (12,000 hectares/30,000 acres). Italy has an area of cultivation of 11,000 hectares (27,000 acres) and somewhat more than 2,000 hectares (5,000 acres) of Cabernet Franc. This variety is represented in nearly all of the winegrowing regions of Italy. Cabernet Sauvignon shows a growing tendency in the regions of Veneto (3,100 hectares/7,700 acres), Sicily (3,000 hectares/7,400 acres), and Tuscany (2,800 hectares/6,900 acres). In Alto Adige, there are currently 111 hectares (274 acres) of Cabernet Sauvignon and 52 hectares (128 acres) of Cabernet Franc producing. The great increase in the 1990s, when the area of cultivation grew from 46 hectares (114 acres) to 202 hectares (499 acres, in 2002), was followed by a downturn. What was responsible for this was the great demands in cultivation and the not so easy marketing of the wines. The distribution of the Cabernet varieties ranges from Bolzano through Appiano to Caldaro and then to the south through Termeno and

Cortaccia as far as Magrè. Only in the lower, extremely warm locations is a complete maturation of the grapes guaranteed every year through the second half of October. Cabernet Franc is somewhat less demanding in terms of location. For that reason, interest in this variety has once again grown slightly in recent years.

Vines

Cabernet Sauvignon has small to medium-sized loose bunches with small black berries. Cabernet Franc produces medium-sized, cylinder-shaped bunches with a loose grape structure with dark blue, rather small berries. The sugar values are slightly higher with Cabernet Franc. In addition, it is harvested around ten days earlier. And the acidity levels turn out to be somewhat lower in comparison to Cabernet Sauvignon.

Wine

With both varieties, the desired wine quality is achieved only with moderate growth. Cabernet wines are distinguished by muted color tones and a powerful structure. The aromatic quality of Cabernet Sauvignon is characterized by black currants, black pepper, cloves, and eucalyptus. Cabernet Franc, on the other hand, shows itself to be fruitier, with tones of raspberries, bilberries, green peppercorns, some bell pepper, and occasionally also with violets. Both varieties are only made with wood and are extremely conducive to aging. Cabernet Sauvignon is often initially characterized by astringency, so it especially reveals its supple character only after a long aging in the bottle by means of the esterification of the tannins. The blending of both of the Cabernet varieties with each other or with Merlot as well as small portions of new varieties (Petit Verdot, Syrah, or Tannat) is increasingly practiced.