

Philippe Boucheron gets to grip with Pinot Grigio



It's official, Pinot Grigio is rapidly becoming the new Chardonnay. A recent survey by Wine Intelligence not only showed that 27.9 million UK adults drink wine regularly, but that 57% of them favour Pinot Grigio. It outstripped the smart aromatic Sauvignon Blanc and was second only to Chardonnay.

Pinot Grigio is the Italian for Pinot Gris, a grape that in Alsace makes generous, fat, often honeyed dry and sweet wines. In the Italian vineyards of the Veneto, around Venice, and the Trentino that runs north of lake Garda into Austria, the wines are light, dry, crisp and rather neutral. With an easily pronounced romantic Italian name, it's not surprising that these undemanding, easy drinking wines have become so popular. In fact so much in demand is this wine that even vineyards as far away as Hungary and Moldava are now calling their Pinot Gris Pinot Grigio.

There are even examples of German and Austrian producers renaming their native Ruländer – their word for the same grape – and printing Pinot Grigio on their labels!

Fizz producers are also cashing in on the act and making sparkling Pinot Grigio, most of which are frankly acidic and tasteless. Others have jumped on to the pink wine bandwagon with Ramato's, the Italian for copper. These copper-tinted wines are made from leaving the freshly pressed juice on its skins for 24 to 26 hours before fermenting.

Like all popular wines Pinot Grigio is suffering from the twin problems of mistaken value for money and greed. The average British wine drinker thinks that anything that costs less has to be good, but this ignores quality that is the all-essential ingredient in establishing true value for money. At the same time supermarkets and high street multiples rush to offer cheaper wines that can only be made by over-cropping and thinning down an already light and rather neutral wine. Hence the endless rows of £3.49 and £3.99 dull Pinot Grigios that fill seemingly endless shelves. But you don't necessarily have to spend a lot of money to get a well-rounded, flavoursome example – Aldi has a delicious well-balanced example from the Trentino for £4.99.

The survey also shows that red sales are in the sunset

As a lover of red wines I was most disappointed to discover that the survey, published in April of this year, shows red wine consumption has dropped to just 40% of wine sales. Leading the reds is the plum, roses and blackcurranty Merlot, followed by the ever popular blackcurranty, chocolate and cigar box Cabernet Sauvignon with the raspberry, pepper and spice flavours of Shiraz, or Syrah, coming in third.

But where do you come in the wine drinking league? Are you one of the 20.9 million of us who drink wine once a week or more, the seven million who drink it once to three times a month, or the 5.2 million who drink it less than once a month? Me? I take a glass or two every day with my main meal, not only because it helps sharpen up the appetite and aids digestion, but most of all because I enjoy it. How about you?

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