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WINE

Clone Wars: Selecting the Right Pinot

Which clones are best for different regions—and how winemakers choose them

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With hundreds of clones of Pinot Noir available from regions all over the world, knowing the difference between them all—and where to plant each—can be a dizzying prospect. Unlike hybrids and vines that result from cross-pollination, a clone is a vegetative propagation from a single parent plant. Over its many years, Pinot Noir has been known to mutate, which has led in part to the numerous clones of the grape. Today, there are around 1,000 different clones of Pinot Noir in the world, although not all are commercially relevant.

Clones in New Zealand and Chile

When clonal selection really got started in Chile in the 2000s, everyone was talking about the Dijon clones, says **Rodrigo Soto, the winemaker for Chile's Veramonte winery**. Soto then found a block of clones 9 and 16, from California, that had been planted at Veramonte in 1994. Considered to be of lower quality and less interesting than the Dijon clones—mostly because they formed larger clusters, had a shaggier canopy that was more difficult to control, and gave higher yields—these clones excelled at Veramonte, especially in comparison with the Dijons, which were weak in vigor and had tiny clusters. As an added bonus, clones 9 and 16 were also disease free, unlike the Dijons that arrived in Chile in the mid-2000s.

While Dijon clones may do exceptionally well in cooler climates, Soto isn't convinced that they are a panacea for a place like Chile, with its Mediterranean climate and dry summers. Dijon clones don't take well to the dehydration that can result from the arid climate, and radiation is a complicating consideration. A thinner ozone layer can lead to burned fruit if there isn't enough canopy cover.

These days in Chile, says Soto, everyone is waiting for the ideal vintage for the Dijons, one that's cool and slow-ripening. Yet Chile has been seeing warmer vintages of late, he says, pointing out that clones 9 and 16 are well suited to such conditions.

"If you want to continue making Pinot Noir in a Mediterranean climate," says Soto, "on decomposed granite, in a very arid environment, I think those selections [9 and 16] go very well."

Veramonte



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