

Focus Varietal: Marsanne

Marsanne is one of the classic white Rhône varieties, and it produces wines with distinct melon and mineral flavors, and rich mouthfeel. When blended, its rich melon characteristics complement more aromatic varieties like Viognier. It comprises about one third of our *Côtes de Tablas Blanc*.

Early History

Marsanne is believed to have originated in the town of Marsanne, near Montélimar in the northern Rhône Valley. The white wines of St-Joseph, Crozes-Hermitage, Hermitage, and St-Péray are made predominantly from Marsanne, often blended with Roussanne. Although Marsanne is not permitted in the wines of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, it is one of the eight white grapes permitted in the Côtes du Rhône appellation. As such, Marsanne is a significant component (usually 30%) of the Coudoulet de Beaucastel white blend.

The grape arrived in Australia in the late 1860s, and has been grown successfully in the vineyards of Victoria ever since. Australia has proved an even more hospitable home for the varietal than its native France – 80% of the world's Marsanne is grown in Australia. It arrived in California in the 1980s, and, although it is not often seen bottled as a single varietal, it is becoming an increasingly important component of white Rhône-style blends. Qupe Wine Cellars, which has been making a single-varietal Marsanne since 1987,

is one of the leading producers. As of 2005, there were 69 acres planted in California.

Marsanne at Tablas Creek

There are approximately three acres of Marsanne planted at Tablas Creek,



representing about 7% of our white Rhône production. The climate in Paso Robles is slightly hotter than Marsanne's native northern Rhône Valley, and the varietal here is an aggressive producer with no significant growing problems, though it is sensitive to water levels. Careful monitoring throughout the growing season is often necessary. Marsanne vines produce a relatively heavy crop

of loosely clustered berries, and require a secondary fruit pruning (of green or unpollinated clusters) six to eight weeks after the initial pruning. This practice, coupled with conscientious leaf pulling, encourages uniform ripening. Marsanne ripens right in the middle of the picking season – later than Viognier, but not as late as Roussanne or Mourvèdre – and its berries are golden and medium-sized when ripe. The varietal has a proclivity for absorbing the mineral flavors of the soils in which it is grown, and we showcase these qualities by fermenting it in stainless steel tanks.

Flavors and Aromas

Marsanne is a light straw color, almost green, with moderate acidity and excellent mid-palate richness. Its mineral flavors and aromas make it an ideal blending grape. The varietal has been historically blended with Roussanne, where it tones down the viscosity of the Roussanne and provides a more complex flavor. Although we do sometimes add Marsanne to our Roussanne-based *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc* (as we did in 2001), the varietal is truly given a chance to shine in our *Côtes de Tablas Blanc*, where it contributes rich mouthfeel and melon and honeysuckle flavors that balance the aromatics of the Viognier. 🍇