

Focus Varietal: Grenache Blanc

Grenache Blanc is the fourth most widely planted white grape in France. It produces rich, full wines with bright flavors and crisp acidity and is a key element in our *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc*. As the name suggests, it is related to the more widely known Grenache Noir. Many grape varieties have both red and white variants; the best known is Pinot, which has Pinot Noir, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris variations. Grenache Blanc, like Grenache Noir, is drought-resistant, vigorous, easy to graft and ripens fairly early in the cycle.

Since we brought Grenache Blanc into our nursery, we have sold budwood and grafted vines to a number of other Rhône-producing vineyards in California. The California climate of hot days and cool nights seems to be perfect for the varietal and encourages its two prime qualities: richness with crisp acids.

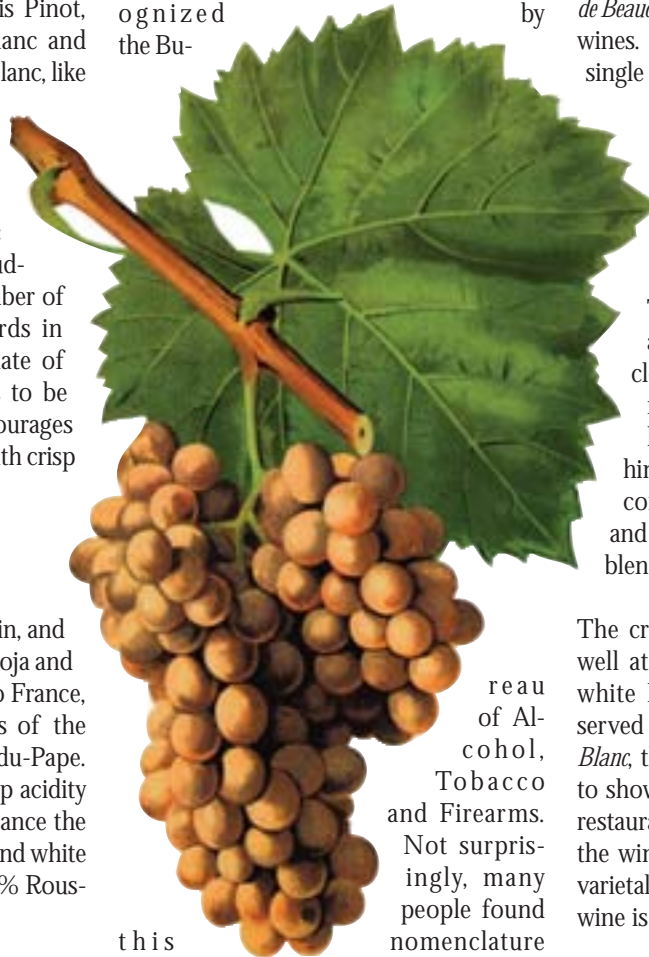
Early History

Grenache Blanc originated in Spain, and still plays a role in the wines of Rioja and Navarre. From Spain, it spread to France, and has thrived in the vineyards of the Rhône valley and Châteauneuf-du-Pape. In Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the crisp acidity of Grenache Blanc is used to balance the honeyed richness of Roussanne, and white *Château de Beaucastel* is roughly 80% Roussanne and 20% Grenache Blanc.

Grenache Blanc at Tablas Creek

We imported cuttings of Grenache Blanc from Beaucastel in 1992, and the vines spent three years in quarantine at the USDA station in Geneva, New York. In 1995, the cuttings were declared virus free and released to Tablas Creek Vineyard. These

vines were received into our nursery and the first grafted vines went into the ground in 1996. The first significant harvest of the varietal was 1999. For the next three years (up to and including the 2001 *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc*), we could only refer to the varietal as Grenache on our label because Grenache Blanc was not yet recognized by the Bu-



this confusion regularly asked why we added a red varietal into our white blend; in 2002 we petitioned the BATF to recognize Grenache Blanc as a separate varietal.

Labeling Grenache Blanc

Having gotten Cunoise approved in 2000, we were familiar with the process.

We compiled literature on Grenache Blanc to show that it was a recognized varietal in other countries, and we compiled descriptions of its characteristics to show that it had positive value as a wine grape in the United States. In February 2003, our petition was approved, and Grenache Blanc now appears on the front labels of the *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc* and the *Côtes de Tablas Blanc* wines. We are also now able to bottle the single varietal *Grenache Blanc*.

Aromas and Flavors

Grenache Blanc is straw-colored and produces wines that are high in alcohol, with crisp acids. The nose has bright green apple and mandarin orange aromas, with clean flavors of more green apples, mineral and a touch of peach. It has a long, lingering finish with a hint of licorice. Although it can stand confidently on its own, its crispness and long finish make it a tremendous blending component.

The crispness of Grenache Blanc shows well at low temperatures, whereas many white Rhône varieties shut down when served too cold. In our *Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc*, the Grenache Blanc allows the wine to show well, even highly chilled (as many restaurants often serve all white wines). As the wine warms up in the glass, the other varieties unfold, and the full richness of the wine is displayed. 🍷

reau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Not surprisingly, many people found nomenclature

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