



Masterclass
TONI PATERSON, MW

Shiraz Viognier

For this month's masterclass, TONI PATERSON MW looks at Shiraz Viognier.

Shiraz Viognier blends are becoming increasingly prominent on retail shelves and restaurant wine lists. However it is a blend which needs a lot of explanation to many wine drinkers. The concept of blending a red and a white grape variety together is foreign to many consumers, with most unsure of what style of wine to expect

Blend origin

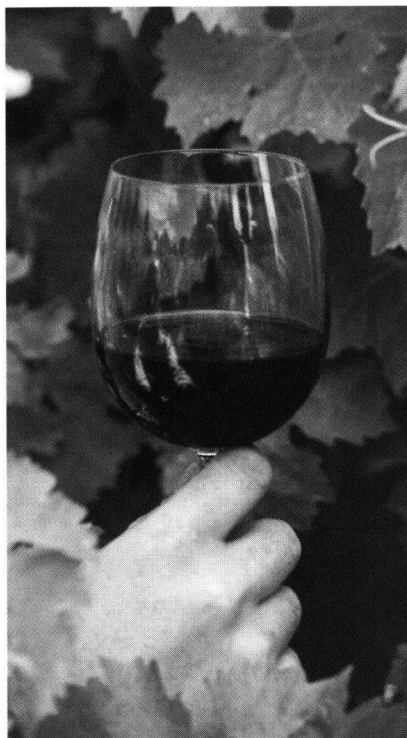
The inspiration for Australian Shiraz Viognier blends comes from the Côte Rôtie appellation of the northern Rhône Valley in France. Here, it is customary to add a proportion of Viognier to Shiraz to enhance the scent of the wine.

Labelling

Australian Shiraz Viognier blends contain a very small proportion of Viognier (less than ten per cent). Because of this, producers are not legally required to declare Viognier on the label. However many producers do so in order to highlight the unique style and to give their wine a point of difference in the marketplace. Other producers see the inclusion of Viognier as a way to make their desired style of Shiraz and consequently label their wine as a single varietal.

Blend characteristics

Shiraz Viognier blends are densely coloured, with medium-to-full body. The finest examples have a scented nose and a floral lift on the palate. Viognier should add an element of complexity and interest rather than being an obvious component. When apricot flavours are present on either the nose or the palate, the influence of Viognier is too great and the balance of the wine is tipped. As Australian Shiraz Viognier blends are in their infancy, many wines show a lack of harmony between the Shiraz and Viognier component, the result being a disjointed wine. These wines aside, there are two main styles currently being produced in Australia.



Firstly are the richly-fruited styles, appealing to those drinkers who enjoy highly flavoured wines. The Viognier component is often heady and there can be prominent oak usage. Secondly, and more desirably, are the supple, fragrant, opulent, balanced wines where no one character dominates. The Viognier enhances the wine in an indeterminable way, resulting in a holistic drinking experience. These wines emulate the great wines of the Côte Rôtie.

Regions

Shiraz Viognier blends can be successfully produced from both warm and cool climates. The Barossa Valley, Yarra Valley, Adelaide Hills and Beechworth all produce excellent examples. Western Australian producers are also experimenting with the style.

Food matches

Richly-fruited styles suit flavoursome foods, as found in Greek, Spanish and Italian cuisine. The elegant, opulent styles complement French-influenced food.

My Selection

2002 TORBRECK DESCENDENT,
Barossa Valley

92% Shiraz 8% Viognier

This is without doubt the best Australian Shiraz Viognier I have tasted. A complex, perfectly balanced wine, with both sweet and savoury flavours. Plush and opulent with fragrant red fruit on the finish. Expensive yes, but worth every cent. RRP \$150

2002 YERING STATION RESERVE
SHIRAZ VIOGNIER,

Yarra Valley

95% Shiraz 5% Viognier

Another sensational example. A complex aroma of spice, truffles and liqueur cherries. Elegantly structured with firm tannins, allowing for development over time. A long textural palate. RRP \$58

2002 CASTAGNA GENESIS SYRAH,
Beechworth

97% Shiraz 3% Viognier

Superbly crafted, this incredibly stylish wine is in an elite league. Floral tones peek out of both the nose and the palate. The palate is supple and elegant and perfectly balanced. Made by a passionate winemaker who truly understands the style. RRP \$55

2002 GRANT BURGE BALTHASAR
SHIRAZ VIOGNIER,

Barossa Valley

93% Shiraz 7% Viognier

A rich, full fruited wine with gorgeous cherry fruit and spice. The fragrance on both the nose and palate is enticing. A complete and harmonious wine which will improve with careful cellaring. RRP \$37

2003 STARVE DOG LANE
SHIRAZ VIOGNIER,

Adelaide Hills

94% Shiraz 6% Viognier

A contemporary example of the style. Exotic fruits are coupled with curious spice. A vivacious and peppery palate, suited to casual drinking in fun environments. Perfectly suited to Spanish tapas. RRP \$19

