



Arinto

FRESH FROM
PORTUGAL

WORDS DAN TRAUCKI

Arinto is an outstanding native Portuguese white grape variety grown throughout Portugal because its freshness, acidity and intensity are valued and much sought after. The main regions in which it is grown are Bucelas (just north of Lisbon), Alentejo, Vinho Verde, Bairrada and Ribatejo. According to Kym Anderson's authoritative book, *Which Wine Grapes Are Grown Where?* there are about 4,500 hectares of Arinto globally, making it the 118th ranked grape variety in the world. Almost all of this acreage is in its native Portugal.

It makes a delightful bone dry, richly textured wine with high acidity that is crisp and refreshing; an ideal accompaniment to seafood, antipasto and lighter-style meat or vegetarian dishes.

In Portugal, Arinto is often blended with other local varieties such as Verdelho, Fernão Pires, Roupeiro and Antão Vaz, with the Arinto adding acidity and crispness to the blend. It also makes a great base for sparkling wines due to its high levels of crisp acidity. As far as I am aware there is no sparkling Arinto made in Australia (yet).

Although most Arinto is consumed when young, crisp and fresh, it has the potential to cellar for up to ten years, during which time it develops very attractive, complex tertiary flavours.

Arinto has a tolerance for both heat and dryness, making it ideal for Australia's hotter, dry, inland wine regions. It is a late-ripening variety that produces medium-sized yellowish grapes that grow in tight bunches and have large leaves to provide shade during the hot summer. It prefers chalky soil to heavy clays and can be a bit susceptible to botrytis.

It produces a very consistent wine with the main characteristics of the variety always being present and then tweaked or fine-tuned by the winemaker's decisions – irrigation, when to pick and how to process it in the winery; wild ferment or cultured yeast, etc.

The inherent characteristics of Arinto are an attractive bouquet of florals, citrus and a hint of stone fruit. On the palate it is full of appealing flavours of limes, lemons and peaches with the occasional nectarine flavour popping up. Due to its high acidity young Arinto is always crisp and bright. As it ages the acidity softens off and peach flavours come to the fore to the extent that a well cellared eight-to-12-year-old Arinto will taste predominantly of yellow peaches.

Aussie-born winemaker David Baverstock is a well-known identity in the Portuguese wine scene where he has been chief winemaker at Herdade do Esporão in Alentejo for more than 20 years. Located in Reguengos de Monsaraz, this winery has 702 hectares of organic vineyards and olive groves. They grow nearly 40 different grape varieties including Arinto.

David said, "I have only used Arinto in the Alentejo region, a warm to hot region in the interior southern part of Portugal. I prefer to use it in blends with other local varieties where its intensity and acidity contribute freshness and balance.

"There is a fashion here now to try and make it more complex with barrel and lees treatment, but I'm not a fan of barrel fermented and wood aged Arinto, I prefer to see the fruit aromatics (citric/lime) and bright acidity coming through in an uncomplicated fashion.

"The best varietal Arintos come from near Lisbon, relatively close to the sea, from the Bucelas and Lisbon appellations. They are elegant in style with intense citric and lime flavours and a touch floral with vibrant acidity. They age well for up to 10 years and take on some Riesling-like petroleum characters after a few years."

Arinto has not ventured far from its native lands, and other than a small mention in California, the only other place it seems to have migrated to so far, is Australia. Aussie Arinto is predominantly grown in the warmer climates such as the Riverland, Rutherglen, Hunter Valley and McLaren Vale where its heat tolerance comes to the fore and allows it to shine.

Zilzie Platinum Edition Riverland

Arinto 2022: Sweet lime and lemon aromas on the bouquet; the palate is lovely and zingy with crisp lime and lemon plus a very refreshing finish. Excellent.

Ricca Terra Riverland Arinto 2021:

Very attractive, mellowing with the extra year's ageing; slightly softer and rounder. Less crisp and zingy than the 2022s with an interesting hint of saltiness on the appealing bouquet. Enjoyable.

Whispering Brook Hunter Valley Arinto

2022: Showing great complexity on both the bouquet and the lighter style palate. Oh, so easy drinking.

Olive Farm Swan Valley Arinto 2022:

Delicate, graceful bouquet of limes and lemons with lashings of crisp citrus on the palate. Very exciting.



As it ages the acidity softens off and peach flavours come to the fore.

Stanton & Killeen Rutherglen

Arinto 2022: One-third fermented in new oak barrels – different in that it has an extra degree of complexity and sophistication including a hint of creaminess amidst the crisp refreshing acidity. A class act.

Lino Ramble McLaren Vale Dot to Dot

Arinto 2022: An attractive, classy wine that amply demonstrates the potential for Arinto in the Vales. Excellent.

Ricca Terra Riverland Terra do Rio White Field Blend of Arinto, Greco and Alvarinho 2022:

A rare if not unique field blend making a most appealing, complex wine of nuance with attractive acidity and a refreshing finish. Delightful.

Lino Ramble McLaren Vale Sly Fox

Fortified Arinto NV: This was the first fortified Arinto I have ever tasted, and it was magnificent. A rich bouquet of dried apricots, sweet oranges, candied fruit and a hint of passionfruit – very complex. The palate is light but elegantly smooth and tasty. Truly superb. Should be more of this. 500mL.

The tasting showed that all the wines involved were excellent and that the varietal characters are inherently similar irrespective of where it is grown – crisp, zingy, refreshing citrus with the nuances coming from its regional climate and the winemaker's decisions. All in all, the future for this emerging variety in Australia is looking bright, albeit off a small base. Like I have said with a few other emerging varieties, they are consistent with the intrinsic varietal characteristics showing through, irrespective of the winemaking technique. ♦

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