

t a n g e n t w i n e s

viognier OVERVIEW

VARIETAL ORIGIN

Viognier is the traditional white grape of the Condrieu and Château-Grillet regions in the Northern Rhône of France. It was mostly planted in the late nineteenth century after phylloxera tore through many original vineyards. Both tiny appellations, Condrieu and Château-Grillet produce only Viognier. The smallest appellation in France at just over 8_ acres, Château-Grillet is also unique in that it is wholly owned by one producer.

In the Côte Rôtie, the Northern Rhône's most northern appellation, Viognier vines grow within vineyards of Syrah. The two varietals are harvested, crushed and fermented together. It is legal here to blend up to 20% Viognier into a Côte Rôtie Syrah. Producers originally liked the addition of Viognier's creamy texture to soften the wines, but today it is used more because of its striking aroma.

A typical Northern Rhône Viognier is lush and big-bodied, with musky, exotic aromas of orange blossom, honeysuckle, and sometimes acacia. Flavor characteristics include ripe peach, apricot, lichee, along with tropical mango and papaya.

Small amounts of Viognier are also grown in a few places in the Southern Rhône. Outside of France, California is the leading grower of this varietal.

CALIFORNIA MODERN DAY

Viognier has only fairly recently come to California, and partially in a somewhat scandalous fashion. It was virtually unknown outside the Rhône until the 1980s when a few California producers brought it into the United States.

Coincidentally, some growers brought over what they thought were Roussanne cuttings at about the same time. In the late 1990s, after these vines were established and producing what growers and winemakers thought was Roussanne, it was discovered that they were actually Viognier. After much testing, re-classifying and a few lawsuits, true Viognier was identified and producers have been able to move forward.

TANGENT VIOGNIER

The fruit for this wine is grown in the famed Paragon Vineyard of the Edna Valley on the Central Coast of California. Planted by winegrower pioneer Jack Niven in the early 1970s, this was one of the first vineyards in the region. The vineyard is now in the capable hands of the second and third Niven generation. They realize the need to keep step with the ever-changing wine marketplace, and have planted a few new varietals in recent years. Viognier is one of them. As the growing season here is lengthened as a result of the temperate climate, and the nearby Pacific Ocean provides a marine influence, Viognier enjoys the same Mediterranean climate as in the Rhône Valley of France.

Viognier fits nicely into the tangent line-up, as it is a vibrant white varietal whose pure characteristics stand out nicely without any need of oak influence. Additionally, it is nice to sip on its own, and is also a great match with many foods. This wine is versatile enough to serve with crab cakes or stir-fried pork.

“a departure from the ordinary, **tangent** explores the limitless possibilities of alternative white wines”