

CicciaBella Wine Training

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Important Service Point: Please don't point bottles of sparkling at people whilst opening and make sure to keep your thumb over the cork after the wire cage has been removed. There can be up to five times atmospheric pressure in a bottle of Prosecco and a cork can leave the bottle at speeds up to 50 km/h. See ['the-physics-behind-popping-champagne-bottles'](#)

Common wine scenario: 'I want something like a big, buttery, oaky chardonnay. What's similar to that?'

This is probably one of the most common questions in a restaurant and has replaced the 'I want something like a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. What's similar to that?' which was actually a lot easier to answer.

This preference for high alcohol, oak and buttery flavours is a hangover from Australia's first wine making efforts. At that time French wine and particularly Burgundy and Bordeaux were the global benchmarks for fine wine. The white wine that most Australian winemakers wanted to emulate was Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Montrachet, still one of the worlds most famous and expensive wines. Aussie vintners thought, not unreasonably, that if they just copied everything that DRC did in the winery they would end up with Australian Montrachet.

At the time in Australia viticulture and oenology were considered separate subjects and there was little crossover between them. Now there is much more recognition that wine is an agricultural product and the path to the most flavoursome wine is growing the best possible grapes. Australia has a much warmer climate than Burgundy and grapes naturally produce much higher sugars and achieve physiological ripeness much quicker than in Europe. When the DRC 'recipe' of 100% new oak (which gives a deep golden colour and intense spice, vanilla and caramel flavours), full malolactic fermentation (which is where crisp malic acids like those found in apples, transform into lactic acids like those found in milk) and long barrel ageing combined with very ripe grapes that fermented to very high alcohols and extracted much more from the barrels, the result was 'a big, buttery, oaky chardonnay'.

A generation of Australians grew up on these flavours and whilst some (typically more commercial) producers still make this style of wine, they are increasingly rare. This is because Australian vignerons began to travel and work harvests in Europe they began to place more importance on growing grapes rather than winemaking techniques. They began to realise that overripe grapes, new oak flavours and 'butteryness' were artificial flavourings. The vignerons we work with seek to grow the best grapes possible, harvest when the acidity is naturally high and ferment in flavour neutral containers to avoid flavours that don't come from the grapes.

Italy managed to avoid most of these problems although if you've ever tasted any of the Gaia (Ultra famous Piedmonte producer) chardonnays you will know they weren't entirely immune. This is because food and wine are intrinsically linked in Europe and Italy enjoys the greatest variety (about 1800) of grapes in the world. The hallmark of Italian wines is a savoury character and structure that is a perfect background to food. They are however nothing like a high alcohol, oak driven chardonnay.

For the reasons above something like a 'big, buttery, oaky chardonnay' doesn't exist on our list. This can be hard to explain to people, so try saying something like, 'We don't really have anything too similar as we're mostly focused on Italian wines that tend to be a bit more savoury, but you could try the guttarolo verdea from Puglia which has is full bodied and textural, but doesn't have any oak flavour.' We may list something a little closer to this style in the future.

Orange Wine: Orange is definitely the new black. Orange wine is a style that until approximately 15 years ago was confined to Georgia (the country, not the state) and a small region on the Italian/Slovenian border. What is it: An orange or amber wine is a wine made from 'white' grapes but fermented with the skins. The juice of 99.9% of grapes of any skin colour is clear. The vast majority of wine obtains its colour from fermenting the grapes in contact with the skins. This is why red wines are red. Different periods of time at different stages of fermentation produce different coloured wines. making wine is a little like making tea, the longer you leave the tea leaves in the pot, the more bitter and deeper coloured the tea becomes. Rose wines are produced by a very short maceration

Grape skins contain among other things phenolic compounds that have antioxidant properties. Producers in the regions above found that fermenting with the skins was a way to naturally preserve wine and that lengthy skin macerations would soften the bitter tannic flavours and produce deep complex rancio flavours.