

= Carménère =

The Carménère grape is a wine grape variety originally planted in the Médoc region of Bordeaux , France , where it was used to produce deep red wines and occasionally used for blending purposes in the same manner as Petit Verdot .

A member of the Cabernet family of grapes , the name " Carménère " originates from the French word for crimson ( carmin ) which refers to the brilliant crimson colour of the autumn foliage prior to leaf @-@ fall . The grape is also known as Grande Vidure , a historic Bordeaux synonym , although current European Union regulations prohibit Chilean imports under this name into the European Union . Along with Cabernet Sauvignon , Cabernet Franc , Merlot , Malbec and Petit Verdot , Carménère is considered part of the original six red grapes of Bordeaux , France .

Now rarely found in France , the world 's largest area planted with this variety is in Chile in South America , with more than 8 @,@ 800 hectares ( 2009 ) cultivated in the Central Valley . As such , Chile produces the vast majority of Carménère wines available today and as the Chilean wine industry grows , more experimentation is being carried out on Carménère 's potential as a blending grape , especially with Cabernet Sauvignon .

Carménère is also grown in Italy 's Eastern Veneto and Friuli @-@ Venezia Giulia regions and in smaller quantities in California , USA and Walla Walla region of Washington United States .

= = History = =

One of the most ancient European varieties , Carménère is thought to be the antecedent of other better @-@ known varieties ; some consider the grape to be " a long @-@ established clone of Cabernet Sauvignon . " It is possible that the variety name is an alias for what is actually the Vidure , a local Bordeaux name for a Cabernet Sauvignon clone once thought to be the grape from which all red Bordeaux varieties originated .

There have also been suggestions that Carménère may be Biturica , a vine praised in ancient Rome and also the name by which the city of Bordeaux was known during that era . This ancient variety originated in Iberia ( modern @-@ day Spain and Portugal ) , according to Pliny the Elder ; indeed , it is currently a popular blending variety with Sangiovese in Tuscany called " Predicato di Biturica "

The Carménère grape has known origins in the Médoc region of Bordeaux , France and was also widely planted in the Graves until the vines were struck with oidium . It is almost impossible to find Carménère wines in France today , as a Phylloxera plague in 1867 nearly destroyed all the vineyards of Europe , afflicting the Carménère grapevines in particular such that for many years the grape was presumed extinct . When the vineyards were replanted , growers could not replant Carménère as it was extremely hard to find and more difficult to grow than other grape varieties common to Bordeaux . The region 's damp , chilly spring weather gave rise to coulure , " a condition endemic to certain vines in climates which have marginal , sometimes cool , wet springs " , which prevented the vine 's buds from flowering . Yields were lower than other varieties and the crops were rarely healthy ; consequently wine growers chose more versatile and less coulure @-@ susceptible grapes when replanting the vines and Carménère planting was progressively abandoned .

= = = Rediscovery = = =

= = = Chile = = =

Far from being extinct , in recent years the Carménère grape has been discovered to be thriving in several areas outside France . In Chile , growers almost inadvertently preserved the grape variety during the last 150 years , due largely to its similarity to Merlot .

Cuttings of Carménère were imported by Chilean growers from Bordeaux during the 19th century ,

where they were frequently confused with Merlot vines . They modeled their wineries after those in France and in the 1850s cuttings from Bordeaux , which included Carménère grape , were planted in the valleys around Santiago . Thanks to central Chile 's minimal rainfall during the growing season and the protection of the country 's natural boundaries , growers produced healthier crops of Carménère and there was no spread of phylloxera . During most of the 20th century Carménère was inadvertently collected and processed together with Merlot grapes ( probably reaching up to 50 % of the total volume ) giving Chilean Merlot markedly different properties to those of Merlot produced elsewhere . Chilean growers believed that this grape was a clone of Merlot and was known as Merlot selection or Merlot Peumal ( after the Peumo Valley in Chile ) . In 1994 , a researcher at Montpellier 's school of Oenology found that " an earlier @-@ ripening vine was Bordeaux Carménère , not Merlot " . The Chilean Department of Agriculture officially recognized Carménère as a distinct variety in 1998 . Today , Carménère grows chiefly in the Colchagua Valley , Rapel Valley , and Maipo Province .

= = = = Italy = = = =

A similar situation occurred in Italy when , in 1990 , the Ca ' del Bosco Winery acquired what they thought was Cabernet Franc vines from a French nursery . The growers noticed that the grapes were different from the traditional Cabernet Franc both in color and taste . They also noticed that the vines ripened earlier than Cabernet Franc would have . Other Italian wine regions also started to doubt the origin of these vines and it was finally established to be Carménère . Although , in Italy , the variety is grown mainly in the northeast part of the country from Brescia to Friuli , it has only recently been entered into Italy 's national catalog of vine varieties and thus " no district has yet requested the authorization to use it " . Therefore , the wine " cannot be cultivated with its original name or specific vintage and the name cannot be used to identify the wine on the label with an IGT , DOC or a DOCG status assignment . " Ca ' del Bosco Winery names the wine it produces Carmenero . In 2007 the grape was authorised to be used in Italian DOC wines from Veneto ( Arcole , Bagnoli di Sopra , Cori Benedettine del Padovano , Garda , Merlara , Monti Lessini , Riviera del Brento and Vicenza ) , Friuli @-@ Venezia Giulia ( Collio , or Collio Goriziano ) and Sardinia ( Alghero ) . Since a ministerial decree of 2009 , producers of Piave DOC wines in 50 communes of the Province of Treviso , and 12 in the Province of Venice have been permitted where appropriate to specify the variety Carmenère on the wine label .

= = = = Other regions = = = =

In modern @-@ day France only a few hundred acres of Carménère officially exist , although there are rumors of renewed interest among growers in Bordeaux .

Carménère has also been established in Eastern Washington 's Walla Walla Valley and in California , United States . In the 1980s , Karen Mulander @-@ Magoon , the co @-@ proprietor of Guenoc and Langtry Estates Winery , in California 's Lake County , brought the grape to the vineyard . This was a joint effort with Louis Pierre Pradier , " a French research scientist and viticulturalist whose work involved preserving Carménère from extinction in France . " Once the vines were quarantined and checked for diseases they were legalized for admission into California in the 1990s , where they were cloned and planted .

In Australia , three cuttings of Carménère were imported from Chile by renowned viticultural expert Dr Richard Smart in the late 1990s . After two years in quarantine , only one cutting survived the heat treatment to eliminate viruses and was micro @-@ propagated ( segments of individual buds grown on nutrient gel ) and field grown by Narromine Vine Nursery . The first vines from the nursery were planted in 2002 by Amietta Vineyard and Winery in the Moorabool Valley ( Geelong , Victoria ) who use Carménère in their Angels ' Share blend .

Carménère has also been established in small amounts in New Zealand . DNA testing confirmed in 2006 that plantings of Cabernet Franc in the Matakana region were in fact Carménère .

## = = Viticulture = =

Carménère favors a long growing season in moderate to warm climates . During harvest time and the winter period the vine fares poorly if it is introduced to high levels of rain or irrigation water . This is particularly true in poor @-@ soil plantings where the vine would need more water . Over @-@ watering during this period accentuates the herbaceous and green pepper characteristics of the grape . The grape naturally develops high levels of sugar before the tannins achieve ripeness . If grown in too hot a climate the resulting wine will have a high alcohol level and low balance . Carménère buds and flowers three to seven days later than Merlot and the yield is lower than that of the latter grape . The Carménère leaves turn to crimson before dropping .

Carménère is produced in wineries either as a single @-@ variety wine ( sometimes called a varietal wine ) , or as a blend usually with Cabernet Sauvignon , Cabernet franc and / or Merlot .

## = = Distinction from Merlot = =

Genetic research has shown that Carménère may be distantly related to Merlot and the similarities in appearance have linked the two vines for centuries . Despite the similarities , there are some noticeable differences that aid the ampelographer in identifying the two vines . When young , Carménère leaves have a reddish hue underneath , while the leaves of Merlot are white . There are also slight differences in leaf shape with the central lobe of Merlot leaves being longer . Merlot ripens two to three weeks earlier than Carménère . In cases where the vineyards are interspersed with both varieties , the time of harvest is paramount in determining the character of the resulting blends . If Merlot grapes are picked when Carménère is fully ripe , they will be overripe and impart a " jammy " character . If the grapes are picked earlier when only the Merlot grapes have reached ripeness , the Carménère will have an aggressive green pepper flavor .

Thus , although different , Merlot and Carménère were often confused but never thought to be identical . Its distinctive differences meant the grape was called a " Merlot selection " or " Merlot Peumal , " which was " a geographic reference to a valley south of Santiago where lots of Carménère was grown " before its true identity was established .

## = = Characteristics = =

Carménère wine has a deep red color and aromas found in red fruits , spices and berries . The tannins are gentler and softer than those in Cabernet Sauvignon and it is a medium body wine . Although mostly used as a blending grape , wineries do bottle a pure varietal Carménère which , when produced from grapes at optimal ripeness , imparts a cherry @-@ like , fruity flavor with smoky , spicy and earthy notes and a deep crimson color . Its taste might also be reminiscent of dark chocolate , tobacco , and leather . The wine is best to drink while it is young .