



COUSIÑO MACUL'S SAUVIGNON GRIS – IT'S THE REAL ONE!

Sauvignon Gris is a rare grape variety and Viña Cousiño-Macul is one of the few wine producers in the world offering the true Sauvignon Gris. No, that's not a typo and the wine is not a special blend. Sauvignon Gris is a distinct white wine variety that has existed for well over one hundred years.

Long cultivated in the Bordeaux region, it wasn't replanted after phylloxera because it yielded a small crop so was less economical. However, it was revived in the 1980s by the ITV (Institut Technique du Vin) in Bordeaux which made it again available to chateaux owners. Noted ampelographer Pierre Galet references Sauvignon Gris as a certified variety, #917, and remarks that it is again being planted in Bordeaux. The revival of Sauvignon Gris in Bordeaux is now attracting the attention of wine lovers.

Says Arturo Cousiño, the winery's President: "We have been growing Sauvignon Gris for as far back as our records go, but it was not until 2002 when we decided to bottle it separately," He offers an explanation about its historic arrival in Chile. In the mid-19th Century, the Cousiño family went to Bordeaux and returned with cuttings of all known varieties. In Martillac, in the Graves District, the family found a source of white varieties consisting of several strains of Sauvignon and Semillon.

When the Macul vineyard was developed by the Cousiños in the 1860s, it was planted to all of the varieties following the Bordeaux practice of intermixing varieties. When it came time to make wine, the practice was to harvest all of the varieties and ferment them together. Thus, the wine was blended in the vineyards, and this "field blending" concept was common at the time and even today is used in many places.

Cousiño's Sauvignon Gris is the real one! In the 1980s, there was some confusion over the identity of what Chilean winemakers believed to be Sauvignon Blanc. Arturo Cousiño explains, "Because we had always propagated and cultivated our own vines, we decided to isolate the different varieties and confirm their identities. One block at Macul contained both Sauvignon Blanc and Sauvignon Gris. In 1982, we developed the first separate block of both varieties. We also eliminated the less desirable variety, Sauvignon Vert, also known as Sauvignonasse." Our Sauvignon Gris has now been verified as the true Sauvignon Gris".

The relationship between Sauvignon Blanc and Sauvignon Gris is similar to that between Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. Pinot Gris also evolved naturally and acquired greater skin pigmentation, and both of these "Gris" varieties yield wines with richer and thicker texture than their predecessors.

Viticulturally, the differences between Sauvignon Gris and Sauvignon Blanc are significant. Says Vineyard Manager Jorge Figueroa, “Sauvignon Gris vines are less vigorous and lower yielding. The berries develop a pale pink tint as they ripen, and Sauvignon Gris ripens several days after Sauvignon Blanc.”

Matias Rivera, Head Winemaker, points out that, “the word “Gris” does not mean grey but is rather an old French word to describe the slight pink tint of the grapes.” Other mutated grapes of this kind include Pinot gris, Grenache gris, and Meunier gris. Explains Rivera, “the pigment itself does not transfer into the wine since we separate the juice from the skins after crushing.”

Over time, Sauvignon Gris has adapted superbly to the Maipo Valley and yields a wine with distinct aromatics of wildflowers and spicy fruits, but with decidedly fuller body and richer texture than its Sauvignon siblings.

Cousino’s vineyards are in the Alto-Maipo (the area of the Maipo Valley closest to the Andes) where the growing season enjoys typical highs around 85-95F with evening readings dropping to 50-55 degrees. This wide swing in daily temperature is ideal for ripening classic wine varieties. The cool evenings allow the vine to slow down and recover and this encourages incremental fruit maturation. Cool evenings also enable grapes to retain high natural fruit acid levels right up to the harvest.

For Cousino’s Sauvignon Gris and other white varietals, the daily high and low temperature swings of the Alto-Maipo mean that grapes preserve unusually crisp acidity when fully mature. The climate and calcium-rich water that feeds the vineyards are ideal for Sauvignons which are naturally full-flavoured, complex, and structurally balanced.

Having now made four vintages of Sauvignon Gris at Cousiño-Macul, Rivera describes the wine’s character as “floral with assertive fruitiness, reminiscent of pink grapefruit and mango and with a rich, fleshy texture and bright acidity. It definitely has a personality of its own.”

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