



WORDS CLIVE HARTLEY

JURASSIC GEMS

IN SOME ways Jura is a lot like many of our smaller Australian wine regions. Tiny in size and accounting for a mere 0.2 per cent of French production, it grows a wide range of wine styles - uncommon for a French wine region and more akin to Australia. At a recent Sydney tasting, hosted by visiting Jura expert Wink Lorch, I tasted an assortment of wines and while five grape varieties dominate Jura plantings (savagnin and chardonnay are the whites, and poulsard, pinot noir and trousseau are the reds) it was the divergence of styles that was most remarkable. Ranging from a crisp Cremant through to Burgundian-influenced chardonnay, as well as purposely-oxidative whites and wines matured partially or fully under yeast flor. Rosé, a light pinot noir as well as a tannic red was also served, not to mention a 'sticky', or to give it its proper name a vin de paille. Throw in the fact that

misreported and misunderstood - I hope I've got it right! Vin jaune has special dispensation from the EU to be bottled in a special 620ml Clavelin bottle, romantically, they say, that this is the amount of wine that remains from a litre after the angels get their share. A remarkable wine when you remember we are talking about a table white wine and not a fortified wine.

During its long years in old oak barrels the wine is not topped up and the yeast veil comes and goes with the seasons. Winemakers can inoculate or seed the barrels, or let nature take its course. Cellar conditions vary, with some producers storing them underground and others in their lofts. An agreed key factor is to keep the wine well ventilated. Throughout this time the local authorities test the wine, monitoring the levels of acetic acid and acetaldehyde. The similarities to flor/fino sherry abound and similar yeast strains are

Savagnin has been DNA tested and identified as the grape traminer, which is the non-aromatic grape akin to gewurztraminer. According to Lorch, records show that it has been grown in the Jura since the 13th or maybe 14th centuries and may have come originally from Spain, as the region of Franche-Comte (the department where Jura is located) was ruled by the King of Spain. The grapes are thick skinned and late ripening. Savagnin, you will remember, was mistakenly sold by the CSIRO to growers in Australia as the Spanish grape albarino. This was unearthed by the French ampelographer Jean-Michel Boursiquot when he was visiting Australia. Since the shock announcement in 2009 growers have got used to selling savagnin or have grafted over their vines and one or two producers have played at making a vin jaune style.

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the Jura has a good spattering of 'natural', organic and biodynamic producers then it does remind you of the diversity you see in a new world wine region.

The Jura region is located east of Burgundy heading towards the border with Switzerland. Along with neighbouring Savoie, it could be regarded as one of the least internationally recognised wine regions in France, but perhaps Corsica might get the guernsey for that. Jura is where we get the name 'Jurassic' and is a hint to the age of the mountains in the region.

The most distinctive wine from Jura is vin jaune, translated it means "yellow wine", and not surprising for France it is strictly controlled by law. According to Lorch's excellent book *Jura Wine*, crowd funded and published by Wine Travel Media in 2014, it must be made from 100 per cent savagnin grapes and be aged for at least five years under a layer of yeast. It cannot be bottled until December of the following year and not sold before January 1, which is now the 7th year after the harvest. Lorch explained that these rules are widely

found in a barrel of vin jaune. However, there are some key differences. Fino is a blend of different years and a product of the Solera system. Vin jaune is not blended but the product of one year, it is also not fortified and generally sits between 13 and 15 per cent alcohol. I'm certain that the savagnin grape possesses more character than the Spanish palomino grape as the raw material. Finally, the climate is vastly different; Jura is considerably cooler than Andalucia.

Acetaldehyde or ethanal, as it is sometimes called, forms when ethanol reacts with oxygen. It can also be created by the flor itself. The flor feeds off the sugar initially and when that is exhausted it moves on to the alcohol. This gives the wine a nutty, saline flavour. When it is bottled a compound called sotolon increases which produces a spice aroma in the aged wine. The smell of fenugreek is often related to sotolon. On the palate vin jaune is dry but richer and more powerful than any fino sherry. They display herbal, mineral and nutty flavours depending on the age.

Although classified as a white wine, vin jaune should be served close to room temperature, that's a French room not an Australian summer room temperature. The wine should be decanted and opened well in advance. It is often described as a gastronomic wine, one that needs food to be appreciated. One classic match is with the yellow-skinned Bresse chicken which is cooked with vin jaune and fresh morels. Drinking it with Comte cheese is also a traditional pairing.

Vin jaune has incredible longevity. In 2012 Christies in Geneva auctioned off a 1774 bottle that had been kept by the same family for eight generations in their cellar in Arbois, and a similar one had been tasted a mere 10 years earlier and was said to be of excellent quality. There is one Jura producer that will label and sell a bottle from your birth year dating back to 1898, which only Japanese resident Ms Misawa Okawa could request - as the world's oldest person.