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## SPANISH IMMIGRANT RAISES ITS PROFILE IN A VARIETY OF STYLES

TEMPRANILLO has been around for a while in Australia and sits alongside a number of other varieties such as sangiovese, viognier and albarino, vying for increased recognition from the drinking public. It's not exactly a mainstream varietal, but it has the potential to break through to widespread public acceptance. Easy to pronounce, it comes in a variety of styles from rose to full-bodied red. Could this be the next new trend, a la pinot gris?

Originating in Spain, tempranillo comes from the word temprano, meaning 'early one'. The variety ripens a full two weeks before garnacha (grenache), and is the country's most popular red variety, occupying 17 per cent of plantings and found in many regions. It is especially famous in Rioja, where it partners garnacha, and is also important in the Ribera del Duero. In Spain it can be labelled under a number of local synonyms: cencibel, tinto fino, ull de llebre and tinto de toro. In Portugal it is known as tinta roriz or aragonez and is used to produce port.

Spain produces a number of different styles of tempranillo. Joven is bottled young and usually see little, if any, oak. This popular style is full of red fruits and light tannins and suits early consumption. Next step up is a Crianza, aged from two years with six to 12 months in oak; the Spanish use either traditional American or French oak. Reserva wines are aged for three years, with one year in oak, and, finally, Gran Reserva is matured for five years with 18 months to two years in oak. The final style is becoming rare, as consumers tend to prefer fruit-driven wines and after five years the wine is decidedly oxidised. Expect to see an orange rim and find earthy, cigar box and leather bouquet with a soft, silky, light palate.

Tempranillo seems to suit Australia's harsh climate; budding late, ripening early and not requiring as much water, in comparison to other varieties. It tends to be a high-vigour variety with big berries and thick skins. When

grown on fertile soils in Australia, the wines can be light-bodied with simple red fruits. In cool climates, red fruits and spice are the key aromas with a lighter texture. These move into more black cherry and become more concentrated as the regional climate becomes hotter. Natural acid levels are low but it does have high levels of glycerine, which produces a silky texture. Restricting the yield and water produces smaller berries, resulting in more fleshy, medium-bodied wines with better tannin structure.

Last year, a group of producers got together to promote and share information on tempranillo. They christened themselves TempraNeo, held workshops and launched a website. The location of the group's members indicates that this grape variety is climatically adaptable: Mount Majura

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Vineyards from Canberra, Gemtree Vineyards from McLaren Vale, La Linea from the Adelaide Hills, Mayford from Victoria's Alpine Valley, Tar and Roses from Central Victoria and the Running with Bulls brand, which sources fruit from Barossa and Wrattenbully. The wineries are often small but some of the names behind them demonstrate vast experience: Don Lewis, Peter Leske, David LeMire MW and Louisa Rose, to name just four.

There has been a surge of interest in tempranillo, with more than 260 producers in Australia, and a number of promising areas are emerging, including New England. Tempranillo blends well; Mount Majura produces an interesting blend of tempranillo, shiraz and graciano, another traditional grape found in Rioja. In true Aussie style, winemaker Frank van de Loo substituted shiraz when he couldn't source any grenache in his locality.

Mount Majura has invested heavily in tempranillo for more than 10 years and

suffered an initial setback. "We originally planted the D8V12 clone, which is a good clone," recalls Frank. "Unfortunately the material we got had leafroll virus type 5, so we replanted the vineyard with the same clone from SA that was clean. This slowed us down for a few years, but was probably worth the investment." As with any new grape, it takes a while to sort out the right clone for the right region.

Narelle King and Don Lewis, the winemaking duo from Tar and Roses, have been making wines in Spain since 2004. In Australia they source tempranillo grapes from Heathcote and the Alpine Valley in Victoria. What first attracted Don to the variety was its unique tannin structure. "You can taste the chalky tannins even in the vineyard," he says. "Tempranillo is an

easy transition from shiraz for Australians as it has a fleshy palate and plenty of sweet fruit. In Central Victoria we get lovely black cherry and licorice flavours."

The amount of oak a wine receives can fluctuate. Frank's advice on oak is that it should be restrained. "The aromatics of tempranillo (especially from warmer regions) can suggest new oak even when there is none, and perhaps this also explains why it is easy to over-oak. More restrained use of oak has definitely lifted the quality of Australian tempranillo in the last five years."

Frank sums up the variety well. "There are many styles, but perhaps the key is a good balance between fruit and savouriness, and between flesh and tannin. It doesn't have a lot of acid, so tannin structure is important in tightening it up and giving drive. I'm biased toward the more aromatic styles from cooler continental climates, but some of the warmer maritime regions can make real crowd-pleasers."