

SAMPLE ONLY FROM JURA WINE BY WINK LORCH - NB CONTENTS MAY CHANGE
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ALL ABOUT THE WINES



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GRAPE VARIETIES

Jura may have only five 'official' grapes accepted into the AOC regulations first established in 1936, but these five are very important in the history of grape varieties. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are of course best known in Burgundy, but have been grown in Jura for several centuries. The other three varieties, Savagnin, Poulsard and Trousseau, can now be described definitively as indigenous to the Jura wine region, indeed close to the primitive ancestors of *Vitis vinifera*, the wild varieties known as *Vitis sylvestris*. Before the arrival of phylloxera in the late 19th century there were many more grape varieties grown in Jura in mixed vineyards, used as

part of a blend. A few still exist in tiny quantities (see final section). Note that pre-phylloxera only about 10–15% of the grapes grown were white, for the simple reason that red wine was the popular colour of the day, considered the standard drink with meals.

In this chapter we explore the history and growing characteristics of these grapes in Jura specifically. The choice of clone and rootstock is examined in more detail in the chapter on growing vines. The taste of the wines they produce is examined in the final chapter of this section on wine styles and how the wines are made.

Previous page: Sunset with west and southwest facing vines at Château-Chalon and Ménétru-le-Vignoble

Left: Ripe Chardonnay grapes

WHITE VARIETIES

Chardonnay

Chardonnay is the most planted variety in Jura. In 2013 it covered 41% of the vineyard area, almost double that of Savagnin, though the percentage has been even higher, with as much as half of the Jura vineyards being planted to Chardonnay in the mid-1990s. Its importance should hardly be a surprise, given the region's proximity to Burgundy and the importance, quantity-wise, of Crémant du Jura, in which it plays such a significant part. However, I estimate (figures are not available) that, given that yields are higher for grapes for Crémant than for still wine, about half is used for sparkling and half for still white wines and Macvin.

In old texts on Jura a string of white grape varieties appears, a few of which, with advancing understanding of ampelographical methods, turned out to be variations of Chardonnay. This plethora of synonyms, often with names that led them to be confused with other varieties, includes most

particularly Pineau Blanc, Melon or Melon d'Arbois in villages around Arbois and Dole in the north of today's Jura region, Gamay Blanc around Lons-le-Saunier, L'Etoile and the south, and Luisant in the Besançon area in Haute-Saône. It is as Luisant that the first known mention is made, with texts from the 14th century in the abbey of Gy referring to the introduction of Luisant. From here to being grown in Jura would not have taken long. Perhaps to protect Savagnin, already recognized as special and valuable, Chardonnay in its various guises was considered an inferior grape, and on several occasions risked being outlawed until 1774, when it was finally recognized for its quality. From then it went from strength to strength, especially for its use in sparkling wines, and in terms of geography most particularly prized in the vineyards around L'Etoile.

Chardonnay in Jura is grown on many different soil types, something recognized increasingly by those producers who choose to bottle cuvées from different terroirs. It seems to suit almost all the variations of clay-limestone marls, although it is perhaps weakest on grey marl – in any case this soil type is generally reserved for Savagnin or Poulsard. Especially valued for fine, almost Burgundy-style Chardonnays are warmer hillside vineyards of marl covered in Bajocian limestone-rich pebbles or scree. The heavier clay-rich Liassic marls, which are so distinctively Jura, are also excellent for Chardonnay, and these soils seem to confer flavours that make many tasters comment on an oxidative character even when a wine is made by Burgundian methods, i.e. regularly topped up.



The village of L'Etoile, known for Chardonnay in particular

As a relatively early ripener, Chardonnay may be prone to late spring frost, and with thinner skins than the hardy Savagnin it is potentially more affected by oidium and subsequent grey rot. In poor weather flowering can also be a problem, leading to

a reduction in quantity. Despite this, today Chardonnay appears, as everywhere, to be one of the most reliable varieties. Much is harvested early for Crémant; for still wines it tends to be harvested after Pinot Noir, and often around the same time as Poulsard.

Melon à Queue Rouge

Confirmed as a natural variation of Chardonnay in Jura, the Melon à Queue Rouge (Melon with a red stalk) usually develops its distinctive red stalk close to ripening, although it can appear as early as just after flowering. Sometimes there may even be some faint redness showing on the surface of the grape skin, giving rise to an old expression 'Les renards ont pissé dessus' or 'The foxes pissed on it.' As an alternative to the ubiquitous clones of Chardonnay, it is becoming increasingly prized and massal selection techniques are being used to perpetuate its existence.

To date I know of at least six producers with Melon à Queue Rouge in their vineyards – Puffeney, Bacchus, La Pinte, Bornard, Credo and Ganevat – but there are many other vigneronns with old vines where Melon will be interspersed. When made on its own, nearly always from an old vine selection, Melon à Queue Rouge shows a particular riper, softer and most attractive yellow fruit characteristic compared to the straight Chardonnays, though sometimes this can also be attributed to the low yields it produces.

Savagnin

The rest of the wine world may have long fretted over whether Savagnin is related to Traminer and which came first, or whether their particular grape variety, known under a different name, was in fact the same as Traminer or Savagnin. But, meantime, in much of the local Jura wine literature dating back at least 150 years one can see the Jurassiens as quietly confident that Savagnin was not only theirs by right, derived from a wild vine, but they also valued it as a very fine wine grape. Early grape scientists did indeed believe that it was at the very least related or perhaps even the same as

Traminer, but many conjectured that it came from Austria or northern Italy. It seems that Jura's supreme confidence has been vindicated. Yes, DNA testing has confirmed that Savagnin is actually the same as Traminer (the better-known Gewürztraminer is an aromatic version) and yes, it originated in Jura. Indeed in 2012 it was dubbed by the authors of *Wine Grapes* as part of an exclusive group of 'founder varieties' and thus the parent, grandparent or ancestor of a whole host of other well-known grape varieties grown throughout Europe, not least Jura's Trousseau.



The distinctive crumbly grey marl that the Savagnin vine likes

In Jura the story of Savagnin, or *Naturé* as it sometimes called, is inextricably linked with the story of Vin Jaune and earliest mentions of it date back to the 14th or possibly the 13th century. Because its origins were not really understood, at some point it was thought to have come from Spain due to the fact that, like Sherry, it attracted a *flor*-type yeast on the surface of the wine (and also that Franche-Comté was at one time ruled by the King of Spain). It was always known as a strong, resistant variety that ripened very late, sometimes not until the first snows or frosts of winter. The ancients knew that in good years with sufficient crop they could make what was sometimes named a Vin de Gelée (picked after the first frosts) or a Vin de Garde (a wine to age), as Vin Jaune used to be named. Due to its thick skins (enabling it to withstand late picking), naturally high acidity and fascinating flavours, Savagnin is an extremely versatile and high-quality grape increasingly used today for a whole range of wine styles beyond the traditional Vin Jaune.

Around 22% of the Jura wine region is planted with Savagnin and if ever there was a perfect marriage between grape variety and soil or geology, Jura has it with Savagnin.

This variety loves the steep south-facing slopes of clay-rich marl soils, especially if they are deep and grey in colour. Being thick-skinned, it suffers rarely from mildew, and grey rot is only an occasional problem, with an often beneficial level of noble rot. It can suffer from *coulure* if the weather is bad around flowering. Sadly, like Trousseau, it is proving to be badly affected by Esca and other fungal diseases affecting the wood.

There are several natural variations of Savagnin, most particularly Savagnin Vert (green) and Savagnin Jaune (yellow), although the latter is more prevalent (see photo). The yellow version gives more aromatic flavours; the green variety is particularly prized for its high acidity, an advantage for the long ageing of Vin Jaune, but also giving crispness to *ouillé* (topped-up) versions. Many producers like to work with a mix, especially for Vin Jaune. Savagnin Muscaté is a rare variation that exists in tiny quantities in the Sud Revermont, giving aromatic flavours somewhat reminiscent of Gewürztraminer (an aromatic mutation of Savagnin Rose), but the berry indicates that it is a sort of white-skinned Gewürztraminer. Apparently the Muscaté version was selected and replicated post-*phylloxera* by Jean Labet of Rotalier, the grandfather of Alain Labet, who ran a vine nursery.

Although flavours are beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be said that mul-

Ripe Savagnin grapes



tiple texts erroneously describe the grape Savagnin giving wines that are distinctively nutty and spicy, classic descriptors for Savagnin wines that have aged under the veil of yeast destined to make Vin Jaune. Yet anyone who has had the chance to taste a Savagnin berry, or juice from the press, or better still drunk Jura's *ouillé* Savagnin wines, knows differently – tangy citrus flavours dominate. This is a grape with a strong personality and I predict that now that the

wine world is more secure in understanding this variety's origins and the fact that it is the same as Traminer (the non-aromatic form of course), and now that Jura has a growing following, we are sure to see more planted around the world. Already there are Savagnins from Australia (from vines previously wrongly identified as Albariño) and from Canada's Niagara Peninsula (see Appendix x). I believe there will be many more in future.

Naturé – an ancient name

You will see *Naturé* on some labels, particularly of Arbois wines, and since the late 1990s, although not an official term, several producers have used *Naturé* to indicate a Savagnin *Ouillé*, differentiating it from the more prevalent oxidative Savagnin,

aged like a Vin Jaune but for a shorter time. *Naturé* or sometimes *Naturel* are old names for Savagnin, and can be found in many old texts referring to Arbois; even 19th- and early-20th-century English texts refer to it as *Naturé*.

RED VARIETIES Poulsard/Ploussard

Even if there is confusion over its name (see 'The sloe versus the Breton'), Poulsard seems to be the indigenous Jura variety over which there is least confusion of place of origin, even though its parentage is not entirely clear. The latest ampelographical research shows that it has a likely parent-offspring relationship with the Valais grape *Rèze*, once grown as *Petit Béclan Blanc* in Jura. Although much revered within the region and in evidence since the 14th century, until the 21st century there was never a whiff of fashion related to this variety, and never any interest on the part of other wine regions to lay claim to it. The only other established vineyard area for Poulsard is Cerdon, in the northern section of the Bugey region, just

The village of Pupillin considers itself the capital of Ploussard

