

# shades of gris



MASTER OF WINE ROB GEDDES

**S**OMETIMES THE WINE INDUSTRY MAKES IT HARD FOR consumers. One case is the lack of distinction between pinot gris and pinot grigio. What do they mean? This is one of those subtle differences that make wine interesting.

The pinot bit is easy. Pinot means pine cone, a reference to the cylindrical tapering shape of the bunch. Gris/grigio (French and Italian for grey) mean the grey skinned type, noir has black skin, and there are blanc (white) and meunier (dusty) variations as well. Pinot gris or grigio come from the same grape. The different names describe respectively richer or crisper styles of wine.

It is a good grower's grape and has travelled well because it easily handles fungal diseases and has strong cropping capacity. It has a reliably pleasant medium or full bodied texture and ripe, spiced pear flavours. The positives make it ideal for damp, cool climates like the Southern Highlands or Mornington Peninsula but it is liable to abuse when grown in kinder conditions because it produces large crops with 'grey' characters

(neutral flavours and crisp texture without much personality to reward the mind or the mouth).

It was this hardiness that was harnessed by the Italians who exported pinot grigio from the 1980s onwards as a 'cocktail party' wine. Marketed in the US by Gallo as Santa Margarita, grigio was an alternative to chardonnay that offended nobody. It became a huge brand in the 1990s and dominated the category and the American view of the variety.

Pinot gris became associated with France, restaurants and food. Wines from low cropped vines that were rich in texture, high in alcohol, and displayed musky spiced pear fruits, became known for partnering quiche Lorraine and tarte a l'oignon magnificently.

Pinot gris/grigio had a slow start in Australia, closely linked to the Mornington Peninsula and two young winemakers and life partners Kathleen Quealy and Kevin McCarthy. They were convinced that Mornington was the ideal home for gris and grigio but had no money to buy land. A chance meeting with *The Age's* then wine writer Mark Shield led to him publishing a story about their belief that gris/grigio deserved a chance. A white knight investor did appear in the mists of the Mornington and their label T'Gallant was born.

Their array of wines still represents the definitive Australian styles of gris and grigio. Picked ripe and low cropped, their gris produces aromatic, almost oily, full-bodied wine. Their grigio, which comes from high yielding sites with more acid and lower alcohol, is a more refreshing and chatty style.

T'Gallant was so successful that it was bought by Fosters, now Treasury Wine Estates. Kevin has recently helped implement the G scale, a style assessment on a scale from 0 to 10, crisp to luscious, endorsed by the Australian Wine Research Institute, and appearing on many back labels to help consumers. Two excellent comparisons are listed in *Top Drops*, the Tim Adams 2014 Pinot Gris and the T'Gallant 2013 Grace Pinot Grigio. [HL](#)

*Our new wine writer Rob Geddes was the third Australian to earn a prestigious Masters of Wine (1992) from the UK-based Institute of Masters of Wine. He is the author of A Good Nose and Great Legs and eight editions of Australian Wine Vintages. He is regularly heard on ABC Radio's Nightlife.*

*Rob chaired the Southern Highlands Wine Show in 2005 and 2006 and was a judge in 2007 and 2008. He judged the revamped Highlands Wine Show in 2013 and 2014. He tastes around 5,000 wines a year and says, "My favourite wine remains the next one."*

Boutique Southern Highlands wineries Tertini and Sutton Forest Estate Wines have been recognised at this year's International Wine Challenge Awards in London. Tertini won a bronze medal for its 2014 Riesling and 2013 Pinot Noir, and Sutton Forest Estate Wines received a commended award for its 'Three Daughters Reserve' Pinot Noir 2012. It was the first time both wineries had entered the international competition. Nick Lo Russo of Sutton Forest Estate (pictured right) said: "To receive this medal of commendation from one of the world's most influential and respected wine competitions was a great honour and something we are very proud of."



# top drops



**Centennial Vineyards NV Sparkling Pinot Chardonnay (\$29.99; 93 points)**

Made from pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot meunier, it has mature yeast and pinot noir aromas. The palate has wonderful richness and balance, showing good intensity. Exotic flavours in a rich flavoured, fleshy textured edition. The Blanc de Blanc is equally good.



**Tulloch Vineyard Select 2014 Hunter Valley Verdelho (\$18; 91 points)**

Custard apple and fresh pineapple tropical fruits wrapped in kaffir lime aromatics. This is a classic varietal weighted and fruited wine with lovely rich front and middle. A fresh-as-a-daisy cocktail party drinking wine that is food friendly and versatile.



**Vasse Felix Heytesbury 2013 Chardonnay (\$70; 96 points)**

No wonder this wine sells out in the early days of its life, with oak in a forward place instead of the usual balance. The wine displays grapefruits and overall lemon in a lovely volume of fruit with rich refined elegance. It has a statuesque acidity in the maker's style with cashew and vanilla.



**Tim Adams Clare Valley 2014 Pinot Gris (\$20; 92 points)**

This is not your usual suspect. A little pink from the gris-coloured skins and the aromas are loaded with sherbet, frangipani, jasmine floral exotica. The palate has an oily entry, musky rose petals in the middle of the mouth and pink fruit. Tingle-like complex flavours, lingering to the long clean finish that holds the musky fruits in place.



**T'Gallant Mornington Peninsula 2013 Grace Pinot Grigio (\$24; 88 points)**

Displays low key pear and flint aromas. In the mouth, the good acidity carries the flavours in a light-medium body with fresh pear and a firm dry grigio-style grippy finish.



**Tertini Wines Southern Highlands 2012 Pinot Noir (\$45; 95 points)**

Very rich varietal aromas with black cherry and cinnamon. In the mouth excellent intense cherry fruit compote building from silky tannin to greater depth along the palate and a cherry pip firmness. Concentrated yet refined wine, balanced with good acid and the ability to age.

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