



# **Wine Economics Research Centre**

## **Wine Policy Brief No. 5**

### **Book Review of *WINE GRAPES: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, including their Origins and Flavours***

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# WINE ECONOMICS RESEARCH CENTRE

The Wine Economics Research Centre was established in 2010 by the School of Economics and the Wine 2030 Research Network of the University of Adelaide, having been previously a program in the University's Centre for International Economic Studies.

The Centre's purpose is to promote and foster its growing research strength in the area of wine economics research, and to complement the University's long-established strength in viticulture and oenology.

The key objectives for the Wine Economics Research Centre are to:

- publish wine economics research outputs and disseminate them to academia, industry and government
- contribute to economics journals, wine industry journals and related publications
- promote collaboration and sharing of information, statistics and analyses between industry, government agencies and research institutions
- sponsor wine economics seminars, workshops and conferences and contribute to other grape and wine events

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Book review of: Jancis Robinson MW, Julia Harding MW, and José Vouillamoz, **WINE GRAPES: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, including their Origins and Flavours**. London: Allen Lane (Penguin) and New York: Ecco (Harper Collins), October 2012, 1242 + xxxvii pages, ISBN 978-1-846-14446-2 (hardback), US\$175 (or \$110.25 at amazon.com).

## **Book Review of *WINE GRAPES: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, including their Origins and Flavours***

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Jancis Robinson MW has done it again! In addition to being one of the world's best known wine writers and broadcasters, including being the wine correspondent for the UK's *Financial Times* since 1989, Jancis has raised the bar once more for global wine reference books. She published *The Oxford Companion to Wine* in 1994 and shepherded it through two further editions in 1999 and 2006. Then in 2007 she published with Hugh Johnson the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of *The World Atlas of Wine*, which tells us *where* winegrapes are grown. And now, after four years of arduous research, she has published – with co-authors Julia Harding MW and José Vouillamoz – the definitive book on *which* winegrape varieties are grown around the world. It replaces Jancis Robinson's much more modest but still popular 1986 consumer guide to grape varieties entitled *Vines, Grapes and Wine*.

This is an extraordinary addition to the literature on varieties in several dimensions: size (1,280 pages and 7lbs/3kgs!), beauty (it includes full-page color reproductions of 80 of the 500 paintings produced for the 7-volume, 3,200 page book, *Ampélographie*, by Pierre Viala and Vitor Vermorel published between 1901 and 1910), accessibility (because it's senior writer is an exceptional journalist), originality (e.g., their vine family of 14 pedigree diagrams and their ancestors), and respect for the scientific literature (a 20-page bibliography up to mid-2011). The authors could have made the book even longer, as there are perhaps 10,000 grape varieties, but they confined themselves to those grape varieties they could find to be still used in making wine in commercial quantities. A preview of the volume is available at [www.winegrapes.org](http://www.winegrapes.org)

The timing of this book is no accident: in recent years DNA profiling has added hugely to traditional ampelography (which has been based on physical characteristics of the vine's appearance). Scientific publications from that vine profiling began in South Australia in 1993 and in California at UC Davis in 1997, and have surged ahead in the fifteen years since then.

When one parent is missing, it is still possible for DNA profiling to identify parent-offspring relationships. And even when both parents are unknown, a probabilistic approach can be used to detect siblings, grandparents or grandchildren. The latter has been done for Syrah, for example: its parents were discovered barely a decade ago to be Mondeuse Blanche and Dureza, its great grandparent is very likely Pinot (according to Vouillamoz and Grando 2006), and it is either a grandchild or a half-sibling of both Mondeuse Noire and Viognier.

In addition to it being much easier to prepare such a book now that DNA profiling technology is available, the book is timely also because of the growing demand for this stock of knowledge. One reason has to do with globalization. Numerous countries are looking to expand their exports of wine, and one way to successfully compete in a crowded marketplace is to differentiate one's product via varietal choice. Consumers, too are always looking for new types of wines, and more so as homogenization of product ranges proceeds with multinationalization of both wineries and wine retailers.

A second reason for this increased demand for information on what grape varieties are growing where relates to the perceived need to adapt to climate change. Especially in the New World where regulations do not restrict varietal choice, winegrowers are continually on the lookout for attractive varieties that do well in climates similar to what they expect theirs to become in the decades ahead. Thirdly, the biotechnology revolution is providing breeders with new opportunities, which is increasing the interest in exploring traits of little-known varieties. And fourth, the book is able to help those seeking to preserve rare indigenous varieties, especially where only old vines survive.

Some varieties are found to be not as rare as previously believed, however. For example, Zinfandel is genetically identical not only to Pimitivo (in Puglia) but also Tribidrag (in Croatia). Also identical are the two 'varieties' in the Liguria region, near Genoa, of Pigato and Vermentino – which are also genetically identical to Favorita (in Piedmont) and Rolle (in southern France).

The 1,368 'prime' varieties currently believed to be grown commercially are listed at the front of the book according to their country of origin. Italy has the most (377), followed by France (204) and Spain (84), and then four other countries contribute just under 80 varieties each (Greece, Portugal, Germany, and the United States). Most of the rest are from

Southeastern Europe and the countries surrounding the Black and Caspian seas. There are many more varieties mentioned apart from these prime ones, carefully listed in the entry of each prime variety as a synonym. Also shown in each prime variety entry are the varieties commonly mistaken for that prime one. Some readers might be surprised to see that Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc are not listed as prime varieties. This is because they are mutations of the single variety Pinot, rather than distinct varieties: they cannot be distinguished by standard DNA profiling, but only by their skin color.

There is a very helpful Introduction that provides a basic guide for non-scientists to the vine family, mutations and clones, vine breeding to produce crosses or hybrids, pests and diseases and, most importantly, DNA profiling. A brief history of the gradual geographic spread of viticulture over the past ten-plus millennia also is provided.

José Vouillamoz complements the other two co-authors of this book in that he is a botanist and grape geneticist who trained in grape DNA profiling and parentage analyses in Carole Meredith's lab at the University of California in Davis. He then worked in Trentino, Italy with Stella Grando and since 2004 has been an independent researcher at Switzerland's University of Neuchâtel. His achievements include the parentage of Sangiovese, the family tree of Nebbiolo, and the expanded genealogy of Syrah and its relationship to Pinot. Together with archaeologist Patrick McGovern of the University of Pennsylvania and colleagues from Georgia, Armenia and Turkey, he was the first to establish the DNA profiles of grape varieties from the Near East. He thus brings great scientific depth to this venture.

Thus this book is likely to be, for the foreseeable future, the ultimate guide to understanding the grape varieties that contribute so much to our enjoyment of wine. Further DNA profiling undoubtedly will add to our knowledge stock over time, but for non-specialists there is more than could ever be hoped for in this single volume.

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### ***References***

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