Marsanne and Roussanne - a Mitchelton Perspective

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History and style
The original Marsanne vines planted at Mitchelton in 1969 came from Chateau Tahbilk. From here we can trace the origin back to the Yarra Valley (where it was called White Hermitage) then back to Sydney. James Busby probably sourced planting material from the Rhône Valley.

The first few vintages of Marsanne we made as tank-fermented dry white. Then lack of space forced us to buy some barrels into which went the Marsanne. From there our Marsanne style has evolved, firstly tank-fermenting, then storing finished wine in American oak, usually producing a disjointed young oaky wine; then to total barrel fermentation in both French and American oak with extended lees contact and some malolactic fermentation, producing a wine that is more completely integrated when released yet still has the extraordinary ageing potential for which this variety is known.

In fact we now have three styles of Marsanne—Thomas Mitchell Marsanne which sees no barrels; our recently released Goulburn Valley Marsanne which is a combination of mostly barrel fermented wines with a short stay in oak and tank-fermented more fruity wine; then our top-of-the-range Mitchelton Marsanne which is the full-on barrel fermented style with big aroma and flavour.

Having a comparatively shorter experience with Roussanne we have been barrel fermenting this wine and find similar characteristics to Marsanne emerging. This wine is being blended with Viognier to produce an interesting and unusual wine showing quite pronounced floral and scented aroma, a little along the Riesling/Traminer lines but with much more dried flower character. The palate has a viscous, almost oily feel, quite full but dry and soft.

Viticulture, Mitchelton Vineyard

Site: Goulburn Valley, Central Victoria
130 km north of Melbourne
18k m N N W of Seymour, 12 km SW of Nagambie

Geographic site: 35° 53min south, 145° 11min east
A ltitude: average 130 m above sea level
C limate classification: warm
A v. annual rainfall: 600 mm (24 inches)
M ean January temperature: 20°C
E ffective degree days: 1570
A v. relative humidity: 60% (growing season)

Climate
The Goulburn River is situated on three sides of the vineyard. There is evidence that the close proximity to the river may have a slight cooling effect during the growing season. Comparative data from the vineyard weather station and a nearby Bureau of Meteorology weather station suggests that the Mitchelton vineyard site is slightly cooler. This ‘mesoclimate’ effect may lengthen the growing season compared with similar local regions.

Soil
Due to the close proximity to the Goulburn River, the vineyard is located on a prior steam landscape, hence the soils are predominantly alluvial deposits. The soils range from sandy loams to fine clay-loams. Red-brown earths overlie lighter clay dominant soils. Topsoil depth ranges from 20–80 cm dependent on proximity to river. The soil pH range is 5.4–6.0.

Clones
Marsanne - originally sourced from Chateau Tahbilk.
- Del Nevo/G riffith (recent plantings)
Roussanne - 1974/cx/vassal

Planting density:
Recent plantings: Row width 2.9 m
- Vine spacing 1.8 m
Original plantings: 3.3 m x 1.8 m

Trellising:
Vertical Shoot Positioning (VSP), single wire (new plantings)
Bilaterally trained
2 pairs movable foliage vines
Panel spacing: 7.2 m
Cordon height: 1.1 m
1st foliage wires: 1.3 m
2nd foliage wires: 1.8 m
Spur prune, 30–36 buds retained
Bearer spacings: 10–12 cm

Disease susceptibility
Marsanne: Reasonable botrytis susceptibility given favourable conditions
- Mild susceptibility to powdery and downy mildew
Young cane-pruned vines have shown some phomopsis symptoms. Some budmite damage has been noted this season in young vines.

Roussanne: High botrytis susceptibility in conditions of high rainfall or excessive irrigation late in season. Medium to large berries tend to get well filled, bunches can become very tight and berry split may occur.
- Mild susceptibility to powdery and downy mildew and phomopsis.

Bunch and grape architecture
Marsanne: Medium to large conical bunches with large spherical berries. Berries typically develop golden brown ‘suntan’ as ripening develops. A ntcliff and K erridge, 1992. Excessive vigour may potentially be a problem. Experience has found Marsanne can be susceptible to overcropping, particularly in immature vines.
Roussanne: Bunch/berry size configuration similar to Marsanne. Berries remain a bright green colour at ripening.

Phenological dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Budburst</th>
<th>Flowering</th>
<th>Veraison</th>
<th>Harvest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marsanne</td>
<td>12/9</td>
<td>30/11</td>
<td>7/2</td>
<td>15/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roussanne</td>
<td>20/9</td>
<td>3/12</td>
<td>10/2</td>
<td>21/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gladstones (1992) classifies Marsanne and Roussanne in Maturity Group 5. This group requires at least 1250 degree days to ripen these varieties effectively. Common varieties in the same maturity grouping include Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Shiraz and Chenin Blanc. We have found that Roussanne consistently matures 7 to 10 days later than Marsanne.

Irrigation management

The irrigation regime is dependent on monitoring soil moisture status utilising gypsum blocks and physically assessing soil moisture condition. In recent years regulated deficit irrigation (RDI) methods have been incorporated in our irrigation management strategy.

RDI has played a significant role in reducing excess vigour and shading. Yields have been reduced by up to 20% in some blocks. However, we regard the long term benefits of improved composition and concentration of flavour components as essential in achieving our quality objectives.

Harvest

Averge harvest details are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Trellis</th>
<th>Yield</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Baumé</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chardonnay</td>
<td>T/VSP</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>20/3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Marsanne (73–83)</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Marsanne (84–97)</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>28/3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiraz</td>
<td>T/VSP</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grafted Marsanne</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grafted Marsanne</td>
<td>VSP</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>18/4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roussanne</td>
<td>VSP</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>21/4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Typical juice analysis for both varieties is 3.5 pH and 5.5 g/l TA.

Oenology

Both varieties are treated in the same way as follows. The fruit is machine harvested into 3 tonne steel bins with a small addition of SO2 and ascorbic acid, and destemmed/crushed using a Vaslin 'Delta' crusher. Enzyme and tartaric acid are added at the receival bin. The must is chilled to 10°C and drained and pressed immediately using one of two membrane presses. Free run (600–640 litres/tonne) and pressings (100–150 litres/tonne) are cold settled separately for 7 days prior to racking. The clarified juice is warmed and inoculated using D47 yeast. Fermentation is commenced in tank for two days at 13–15°C and then pumped to oak barrels at around 8–10 Baumé. Fermentation temperature reaches a maximum of 23°C and is normally complete in 7 days. The temperature then drops to 12°C during the winter months.

Malolactic fermentation occurs naturally as the wine warms in spring. The barrels are stored in an underground cellar for up to 10 months. Typical oak proportions are 20–35% new (mainly French) with the balance of the wine in a mixture of 1–4 year old oak. The wine is pumped to tank in February (usually) of the following year, fined using bentonite and skim milk, acid-, SO2- and ascorbic acid-adjusted, then cold stabilised and clarified prior to bottling. Both varieties are susceptible to oxidation and juice will brown in the glass during fermentation in a similar way to botrytised juices.

Marketing

Marsanne

Mitchelton produces two Marsanne wines for domestic consumption which are differentiated through price and packaging to complement each wine's style.

Mitchelton Goulburn Valley Marsanne is packaged similarly to its companion Shiraz with a contemporary colour scheme using recognisable Mitchelton label shapes. It is targeted to a mid-level consumer with some knowledge of food and wine, and is placed in the context of Mediterranean foods and the casual dining environment.

The Mitchelton Marsanne is made in a reserve style with fuller oak treatment complemented by some bottle age prior to release. Accordingly it is dressed in more elegant and classically styled packaging still using the Mitchelton hallmark oval-over-rectangle labelling. Its niche is more the knowledgeable consumer who recognises quality wine and appreciates the individuality of the variety. At its price point it is more likely to be consumed in a more formal meal.

Roussanne/Viognier

The Roussanne/Viognier blend is packaged uniquely in the Mitchelton range, using very distinctive, high quality packaging. It is designed to stand out and highlight the fact that it is an uncommon blend (in Australia anyway), interesting and prestigious. It is designed to appeal to a knowledgeable, wine-interested consumer who recognises the value inherent in the wine and sees it supported fully by its packaging and price.

Distribution channels

The two Marsanne wines are distributed nationally via our traditional arrangement with a distributor which takes responsibility for the physical distribution and representation for the Mitchelton brand. Due to the quite limited quantities of the Roussanne/Viognier blend, a decision was taken to market it through our direct channels, i.e. visitors to cellar door and the Mitchelton Wine Club.

References
