The vineyard

T'Gallant harvests Pinot Gris grapes from eight vineyards on the Mornington Peninsula. Hence I will speak about the viticulture in general terms. The viticultural problems experienced annually are:

- excessive vegetative growth
- poor fruitfulness
- poor set
- small bunches
- botrytis
- minimal tannin in red wines
- high acid in white wines
- a tendency for grapes to taste like canopy rather than fruit.

All these problems can be solved with management.

Planting

T'Gallant plants 3,750 vines per hectare at 2.5 × 1 m.

Pruning

These dimensions maximise light between rows, as canopies are over 1 m in height. The close spacing is to allow maximum efficiency with cane pruning. Cane pruning is preferred to spur pruning as it:

- increases fruitfulness;
- keeps the band of fruit to a manageable zone;
- improves fruit exposure; and
- reduces wood disease.

Canopy management

Vines are vertically trained, with some experiments with Scott Henry types. Shoots are thinned around the crown before flowering. Hedging is done after flowering in late December and again in February.
Timing of vineyard operations is crucial to ensure the job is efficient. Canopy management costs around $1,500 per hectare; pruning approximately $2,000 per hectare.

**Variety and clonal selection**

Pinot Gris was chosen because it is a low acid variety in an area which experiences high acidity in grapes. Pinot Gris is harvested at lower acidities on the peninsula than is Chardonnay.

In terms of botrytis, the bunch architecture of Pinot Gris is similar to the M V 6 clone of Pinot Noir, and is about as resistant. Truthfully, a slight infection of botrytis in a white wine does not have the same detrimental effect on quality as in red grapes.

We grow clone IV 7 U CD which has a bunch size of 50–80 g—about the same as M V 6 Pinot Noir—thus resulting in lower than optimum yields. Without question we have the right variety and over the years we will examine other clones.

**Phenological dates**

The Mornington Peninsula has two major soil types. One is the lighter grey-brown shallow sandy loam. Pinot Gris was picked for the first time on 15 A pril, one week after the Chardonnay.

Pinot Gris on the red-brown clay loam, which we make more active use of, flowers one week after Chardonnay, from the third week in N ovember to 10 December, which is a long flowering period. G rapes ripen to 13 Bé between 14–21 A pril; 14+ Bé is achieved between 6–14 M ay.

**Yields**

Crop sizes are restricted by:

- small bunch sizes;
- site selection; and
- costs involved in laying down (i.e. cane pruning) fruitful buds.

Yields have been a real problem on the Mornington Peninsula over the last five years. Generally yields are consistent with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Our yields have varied over the years from 2.5 to 15 tonnes per hectare depending on the vineyard, and all vines are vertically trained. A t yields of 15 tonnes to the hectare, we still harvest high quality 14 Bé fruit.

**Extent of planting**

Pinot Gris has entered the second stage of vineyard development on the Mornington Peninsula.

T’Gallant home vineyard has 7.87 ha of yielding vines and we have an additional 7.87 ha planted under contract. There are another seven small high quality vineyards already supplying T’Gallant with fruit.

Although it appears the ‘established set’ on the peninsula is not planting the variety, there are other wineries in the area with Pinot Gris. Ernies Estate and Stumpy Gully are examples. A tready 20 ha on the Peninsula are planted to Pinot Gris and it is estimated that another 20 ha have been planted over the last two years.

**Harvest data**

We aim to harvest the grapes as late as possible. T his gives the resultant wine a heavy ‘late picked’ character and tends to build ‘weight’ into the palate. Grape composition is: 8 g/L titratable acidity; pH 3.0–3.1; Bé 13–14.5.

By mid-A pril pH and acids are stable and the Pinot Gris is kept on the vine until berry shrivelling or botrytis looks imminent. A t present, all grapes are hand harvested.

**Winemaking**

The T’Gallant Tribute Pinot Gris and the T’Gallant Pinot Grigio are made in a similar fashion. T hat is:

- whole bunch pressed;
- only 600–650 L/t yield, balance of pressings culled;
- fermentation in steel;
- some solids fermentation;
- minimal SO₂ until fermentation complete;
- fermentation at 15–20°C;
- the final Bé of sugar takes about 1–2 weeks to finish;
- blending the two styles after fermentation of each batch complete (the Tribute style is the richer and more powerful);
- fining and settling with isinglass; and
- usual filtration and bottling at winery.

**Marketing**

If you tell people you did it first, they don’t care. If you try to convey the angst of all those years trying to get the project up they still don’t care. So when we market T’Gallant Pinot Gris or T’Gallant Pinot Grigio we just bowl them over with quality. T he market place and the press are interested in the high quality of our wines as well as the fresh tastes and styles we have produced with this variety. Essentially our market is Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and cellar door. M ore recently there have been sales to the US market.

**Packaging**

T he wine is bottled in 750 mL green claret bottles. T he claret bottle gives a more modern feel. T he label designs by Ken Cato have evolved over the years. T hey are beautiful labels which perhaps have given many consumers the confidence to buy the wine. T he Pinot Grigio is sleek and chic and presents a modern quality product. T he vertical stripe with T’Gallant has overcome the need for a neck label.

T he Tribute Pinot Gris is a more classic style. T he market for the Tribute Pinot Gris is the red drinker who likes big, high quality, high priced wines. O ur aim over the years is to make Australia’s premium cellaring white wine. T he other market for the Tribute Pinot Gris is for people who already drink high quality, powerful white wines.

**Conclusion**

With Pinot Gris, T’Gallant set out to make a distinctive regional wine. T he aim was to make a wine that was profitable, reliable and highly sought after.

Pinot Gris has performed well for us in the vineyard, the winery and the marketplace. N ow the third stage of Pinot Gris is taking place in Australia. V ineyards all over Australia are planting the variety. A s I said earlier, no-one cares if you are first, you have to be the best. I’m confident the Mornington Peninsula, with its rich red soils and maritime climate, will ensure T’Gallant will always make a tremendous Pinot Gris and Pinot Grigio.