

What's all the Fuss about Cool Climate Wines?

Article from Paul White, Chairman - International Cool Climate Wine Show

Some lovers of wine just want a full-bodied Rutherglen red and feel that the recent attention being devoted to Cool Climate Wines is nothing more than an act of snobbery. On the contrary, if one is prepared to slowly savour a wine, then Cool Climate Wines (CCW) can be highly rewarding.

In general, a CCW tends to be more subtle in taste, with lower alcohol and a light body, but higher in acidity and the accompanying flavours – such as spicy, floral or herbaceous tones – will shine through. Aromas and flavours in CCW are complex and intense with the natural acidity bringing brightness and freshness. Accordingly, CCW are better suited to match a wide range of foods due to their medium bodied flavour profile which compliments your meal rather than overwhelms it.

Simon Hall, Winemaker for Simall Wines says “Most of my wines reflect the cool climate characteristics preferred by most of us. They aren’t as overpowering or rich as wines made from grapes grown in warm and hot climates. As I make my wines to possess an acid structure and finish that works well for a range of dishes, I like to describe them as balanced, where the many elements are in harmony. That’s the reason I fell in love with cool climate grapes.”



So, what defines a CCW?

CCW are made from grapes grown either:

- South of latitude 37.5 degrees South
- North of latitude 37.5 degrees North
- From a property in the Southern or Northern Hemisphere which has an average January/July (as applicable) temperature below 19.5 degrees Celsius, as confirmed by the nearest Bureau of Meteorology site, or a vineyard site above 400m in altitude.

These vineyards are exposed to concentrated sunlight and cooler air temperatures which allow for longer ripening periods producing better balanced wines with moderate alcohol levels. The lower temperatures and higher solar radiation make for more concentrated flavours in the wines as UV rays are better able to penetrate the skins of the grape and ripen the pips producing supple tannins.

Some excellent CCW are grown outside these latitude ranges but at altitudes exceeding 400m above sea level. According to leading Orange winemaker Philip Shaw, less than 1% of Australian vineyards are above 600m. Slim pickings. He knows of no vineyard in Western Australia which comes close to 600m. In South Australia, the highest reaches of Clare Valley and Adelaide Hills nudge the 600m mark.



But head east, especially north, and you will find a clutch of regions with vineyards over 600m, the highest rising to 1200m. They are nestled in or around the Great Dividing Range which runs roughly parallel to the Queensland, New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria coastline for some 20,000km. Accordingly, some excellent CCW can be found in vineyards around Canberra, Bathurst and Orange and even into the Queensland hinterland.

Lower temperatures are not the only reason why these altitudinal regions enjoy long growing seasons. The Great Dividing Range acts as a barrier to coastal summer rains which are a feature of Queensland and New South Wales' tropical weather systems. Grapes can 'walk to ripeness,' with slow and steady tannin development and flavour accumulation. Higher ultraviolet light at altitude also helps to concentrate flavour compounds and produces higher but softer tannins.

All types of wine can be grown in either cool or warm climate, but they will have differing tastes from each other. For example, you can buy a pinot noir from either climate region, but a warm climate pinot will have a fuller body as opposed to the traditional light-bodied pinot.

Some of the more commonly grown CCW from around the world include:

Whites:

Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio, Madeleine Angevine, Bacchus, Solaris, Chasselas, Müller-Thurgau and others

Reds:

Pinot Noir is the main red that does exceptionally well in cool climate wine regions. But some great Shiraz and Cabernets can be produced in cooler areas as well, including on the Mornington Peninsula. Other CC reds include Gamay, Schiava, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Rondo, Regent, Lagrein, Chambourcin

The following chart might be useful as a general summary:

Wine characteristic	Cool climate	Warm climate	Hot climate
Fruit style	Lean, Sharp	Ripe, Juicy	Overripe, rich
White wine flavours	Apple, Pear	Peach, Melon	Mango, pineapple
Red wine flavours	Red berry, Cherry	Dark berry, Plum	Fig, prune
Body	Lighter	Medium	Fuller
Acidity	Crisp, Tangy	Integrated	Soft, Smooth
Alcohol	Lower	Moderate	Higher
Overall Style	Elegant, subtle	Medium intensity	Bold





International Cool Climate Show - 2019 Judges

Locally, the Committee of Management for the International Cool Climate Wine Show was, in 2020, about to celebrate 20 years of promoting CCW and providing the opportunity for Mornington Peninsula growers to benchmark their wines against other CCW from around the world. Unfortunately, the corona virus entered the scene, and it has been forced to cancel the Show. Overseas judges are unable to attend and interstate judges are unable to make a firm commitment either.

We are now committed to a Show in 2022.

We welcome our partners for 2022



RIEDEL , Grapeworks & SW



We look forward to working with our team including the support from the wineries, our Partners, the 17 judges and the 50 stewards.....

“Relationships make a difference.”



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