

# IMPORTED WINES: A POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Simon Calabria looks overseas to introduce more flavours, more variety and better wine drinking.



**Domain  
Wachau**  
Gruner  
Veltliner  
'Terrassen'  
Federspiel  
2009 (\$25)



**Quinta do  
Ameal**  
Louriero  
2009 (\$32)



**Pittnauer**  
Blaufrankisch  
Rose  
2009 (\$24)



**Descendientes  
de J. Palacios**  
'Petalos'  
Mencia  
2008 (\$49)

With so many quality Australian wines on the market it is easy to forget there's an ever-increasing selection of imported wines available. In fact, over the past few years the range of imported wines has not only increased in diversity but, thanks to some good recent vintages and a healthy Australian dollar, the quality has been high and prices more accessible.

It wasn't long ago that wines made from grape varieties such as sangiovese, nebbiolo, pinot grigio and tempranillo were the main domain of the imports. With Australia being such a fast adopter of these 'alternative' varieties, you're now just as likely to find wines made with these varieties from Australian makers.

It is great to see these new varieties grown in Australia, a sign that we're willing to expand our vinicultural horizons, exploring which 'new' grape varieties are best suited to different winegrowing regions and their climatic conditions. Consumers are also showing typical Australian adventurous spirit in their willingness to drink these new varieties (whether imported or local).

One reason is our palates have continued to mature, and part of this process is seeking out different flavours and discovering new and exciting wines. Another reason is we often hear or read imported wines are more food-friendly. This may be the case, but the modern wave of Australian winemaking and adoption of new varieties is food-friendly as well.

It's more likely the wines represent something different. Sometimes this relates to the winemaking styles, but generally the difference is simply referred to as 'terroir' – a term used to reflect how the characteristics of a wine relate to the sense of place, soil, climate and conditions unique to that vineyard or region.

This association with terroir is understandable when the varieties are native to a particular country or area. Some such varieties available include names such as gruner veltliner and blaufrankisch (from Austria), nero d'avola and aglianico (from

Italy), mencia (from Spain) and louriero and various tourigas (from Portugal). They certainly provide some points of difference to Australian-made wines and contribute to the continued exploration of imported wines.

Gruner veltliner is a white variety most often associated with Austria typically showing citrus and stone, along with some spice and palate texture. Like riesling, it makes a strong statement of its terroir. Louriero is a native white grape from Portugal, displaying fresh (mostly lemon) citrus notes, some floral aromas and good natural acidity. Perfect for summer drinking.

Blaufrankisch—mainly from Austria (but also Germany and Bulgaria)—can display juicy blue fruits and well-integrated tannin structure. It is sometimes compared to the better cru Beaujolais, and even Burgundy. Unsurprisingly, it makes for delicious rosé.

Mencia is a Spanish grape making complex and intense wines with deeper, darker fruits but combining softer tannins. In Australian terms it reminds me a little of old vine, cool climate shiraz with a wilder temperament.

Irrespective of the reason, it's easy to see why consumers would get excited with the quality and diversity of current imports. This is certainly the case with the wines selected for this article: they're different from Australian wines but no less enjoyable. If anything, hopefully we'll see the importers pass on the savings from our continued strong currency. That way, we not only save a few dollars but we can continue to explore a wider range of these exciting wines.

*Prices shown are RRP per bottle.*

Simon operates Winecall, an internet-based mail order wine business. For more information go to [www.winecall.com.au/winetalk](http://www.winecall.com.au/winetalk)