

Y A L U M B A



THE VIRGILIUS
EDEN VALLEY VIOGNIER



Gold - Blue Medal
Top 100

Sydney International
Wine Competition 2004



Gold - Blue Medal
Top 100

Sydney International
Wine Competition 2007

*“...Yalumba’s Virgilius improves every year
and is one of the few Aussies with any
pretensions to an ability to age”*

Ken Gargett, The Courier Mail - May 8th 2007

Prized Fighter - Viognier is continuing its battle back from the brink.

In 2002, a remarkable event was held in the Barossa Valley, a viognier symposium. Tastings, seminars, masterclasses and their ilk occur all over the world every day, so why was this so special?

Less than 40 years earlier, the variety was almost extinct. In a tiny French appellation of the French Condrieu, in the northern Rhone, there was a mere 8ha remaining. And that was it. Not promising, yet its revival, nothing short of miraculous, attracted about 200 winemakers, trade aficionados to learn more and to taste our way through hundreds of examples from around the world. There is no way that any of the traditional varieties such as chardonnay or riesling would have generated that sort of passion and interest. Perhaps that is because those varieties are much better known and viognier offered the thrill of the new.

Aside from, at its best, making wonderfully hedonistic wines with voluptuous flavours and a ripe, seductive texture, it also contributes to the “hot flavour-of-the-month” red, the shiraz viognier blend. These see tiny percentages of viognier co-fermented with shiraz to lift colour and flavour. This style also had its genesis in the Rhone Valley, in the appellation of Cote Rotie.

Viognier raises the debate of whether a grape must age well, that is develop further and more complex flavours over many years, to be considered as one of the great varieties. This is part of the reason why whites, such as chardonnay and riesling, qualify (there is more to it than merely ageing) whereas sauvignon blanc and pinot gris miss out. Again, with a few exceptions viognier rarely ages well. A few from Condrieu do, while some will sing the praises of another, even smaller, appellation in the northern Rhone, Chateau Grillet. This 4ha appellation is situated inside Condrieu and the wines come from a single producer. There are also questions as to whether it is a variety that works well with oak or is best naked.

The consensus seems that older oak can work but rarely new barrels. In Australia, there are now just over 1000ha planted. Three-quarters of those are in cooler regions yet half the production is from the warmer inland vineyards. California also has expressed interest in the variety though they have only planted about 120ha.

Without this New World interest, the variety would have struggled.

Here, **Yalumba** is closely associated with viognier, with winemaker **Louisa Rose** making several versions, but it was Elgee Park on the Mornington Peninsula that first planted the variety. Much work is being done on the clones best suited to Australia. They are important not least for their contribution to the variety’s all important texture. **Yalumba** has seven new clones but don’t hold your breath to try them. In 2008, they’ll contribute a barrel or two.

The five year anniversary of the initial symposium was recently repeated in Melbourne, though with diminished numbers and a more modest program. It was a great chance to chart our progress with the grape. **Yalumba’s Virgilius** improves every year and is one of the few Aussies with any pretensions to an ability to age.

(Abridged)