

Behind the
Top Drops

Crittenden Estate Cri de Coeur Savagnin Sous Voile



Rollo Crittenden with sister Zoe Crittenden, co-director and manager of Crittenden Estate

Crittenden Estate have long been pioneers – of organic viticulture, sustainable production and varietal expressions in winemaking. After it was revealed that a mix up meant that their pioneering ‘Albariño’ was in fact Savignan, Crittenden became pioneers of that variety instead. Using methods favoured by winemakers in the Jura region of France, the Mornington Peninsula producer matures this wine under flor yeast which forms a film over the top of the wine sitting in un-topped barrels. Among numerous other accolades, Crittenden’s Cri de Coeur Savagnin Sous Voile recently received, for the second year in a row, the high score of 97 points by the Halliday Wine Companion, for its 2025 edition. **Meg Riley** spoke to GM, winemaker and vineyard manager Rollo Crittenden to find out more about this esteemed wine.





Crittenden Estate on the Mornington Peninsula

When was the first Cri de Coeur Savagnin made and what prompted its release?

Savagnin has an intriguing history in both broader Australia as well as at our vineyard on the Mornington Peninsula. Originally we grafted, what we thought to be, Albariño onto some old Chardonnay vines at our home vineyard in 2007. After two releases of Albariño under our Los Hermanos label we discovered that there had been a mix up with the sole source of planting material for Albariño brought into the country in 1980. As a result, we, along with all Australian Albariño producers at the time, were found to actually be growing the French (Jura) variety, Savagnin – not Albariño. After much confusion and frustration this mistake ultimately led to our first flor aged Savagnin being released from the 2011 vintage. We now look upon the mix up as a true blessing in disguise.

How has Crittenden’s production of Savagnin evolved since this initial release?

Given we were really looking for a solution to a problem, rather than embarking on a clear winemaking strategy, our Savagnin production was very limited at first with just the one barrel produced in 2011. Conservatively, this wine spent just 12 months under flor at the time. Since then, we have increased production to around 4-5 barrels each year (that being our entire harvest from just 0.6 acres under vine) and are now ageing the wines for about four years under flor. We have also introduced a Macvin to the range (also stylistically traditional to the Jura) which is a blend of flor aged Savagnin and current vintage Savagnin grape juice in equal parts. The blend is then fortified to 17 per cent with grape spirit and aged for a further 12 months in barrel before bottling and release.

Are there any idiosyncrasies that come with managing these vines?

We find that Savagnin is very well suited to our cool maritime climate here on the Peninsula with harvest usually occurring soon after Chardonnay. We have noticed that Savagnin seems to throw a decent crop, with periodic fruit thinning required to ensure the varietal characters and intensity are not compromised. Otherwise, we manage the vineyard in a similar way to the other varieties we grow.

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Describe the current winemaking process that brings the wine to fruition, from picking through to bottling:

The first part of the process is quite conventional. The grapes are hand harvested, whole bunch pressed and then fermented with wild yeast in well-seasoned barriques. Following the first summer (and malolactic fermentation) we stop topping the barrels and shift them to a well ventilated (uninsulated) shed on the property. We encourage the flor yeast to grow on the surface of the

wine which will either occur naturally or failing that, require inoculation from a commercially available strain. The wine then spends up to four years ageing under the protective flor before we assemble the barrels in tank and then sterile filter before bottling. The only SO₂ addition made is a small amount at the press prior to ferment.

How does this Savagnin fit the stylistic expectations of the variety in Australia?

It's safe to say our Savagnin does polarise people. Its dry, Fino like characters are

not to everyone's taste and do defy convention for normal Australian expectations and palates. Those who enjoy the style though have embraced it with enthusiasm, which is very encouraging for the continued success of the wine.

Greatest challenge in making the wine itself?

Without doubt the greatest challenge is the dark art of aging wines under flor. Any wine spending years on ullage without SO₂ is going to run into issues

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on occasion, and we've seen them all. VA and Brettanomyces are the two biggest challenges we face though I feel we are gradually getting better at managing them.

Any plans to alter the winemaking inputs in the future?

We are always looking to learn and evolve but there are no radical changes planned.

What are the aging recommendations for the wine?

Given the wine is semi-oxidised (due to its flor ageing process) it has excellent capacity to age. We recently conducted some full vertical tastings and all wines were aging beautifully, with time seeming to benefit and enhance the characters rather than diminish them.

Most notable accolades?

We have been very fortunate to receive some considerable commentary and accolades for our Savagnin project over the years. Most notably we have received five trophies for various vintages across a range of wine shows – the pinnacle being the 'White Varietal' trophy at the National Wine Show in Canberra this year for our 2018 Savagnin.

Best vintages?

Despite the oxidative process providing all vintages with a unique and distinctive underlying character there are definitely still vintage variances which show

though each year. While the wines do continue to evolve in bottle, a recent tasting highlighted the 2013 and 2015 vintages to be drinking particularly well at present.

What does the wine retail for and where is most of it sold?

It retails for \$95. Not cheap I admit but then I can assure you with the loss of volume due to the ullaged 'flor ageing' process and the attrition of the occasional barrel, it's not the best earner in our range! Fortunately, the price doesn't seem to be a barrier to its sales with several notable restaurants supporting it by the glass as well as keen consumers happy to purchase direct from the winery.

Any other comments?

Only that it's been a bit of a rollercoaster of a ride making these wines and establishing the brand on the back of the Albariño identity issue. A very fun ride though and one that I'm very much looking forward to continuing. **CW**



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