Chambourcin

Chambourcin is a French-American interspecific hybrid grape. The hybrid was produced by Joannes Seyve who often used Seibel hybrids that were developed in the 1860’s. It is thought to be a cross between native North American vines and a Seibel hybrid. The grape has only been available commercially since 1963. It has good resistance to fungal disease, and is one of the parents of the new disease resistant variety, Regent, which is increasing in popularity among German grape growers. Chambourcin is considered a very productive grape.

Chambourcin can be made into a dry style or one with a moderate amount of residual sugar. Chambourcin is a teinturier – a grape whose juice is pink or red rather than clear like most red vitis vinifera grapes.

Chambourcin has been planted in mid-Atlantic regions of North America, particularly states such as New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Southern Illinois Missouri and Kansas. It is grown as far north as Canada, and it is also grown in Australia, France, and Portugal. It is one of the world’s most popular hybrids. It is planted in significant quantities in Nantes, France in western Loire, where it can be used in table wines. It does not fit is France’s AOC (Appellation d’origin controlee) system. This area of France is generally known for its white Muscadet wines.

It is often used to blend with other varieties to add color and depth. It can be used to make big, rich reds and light fruity rosé wines. It is also used to produce sparkling red wines.

Chambourcin wines are often spicy, with black cherry and plum flavors and a range of herbal characters. It needs a long growing season to ripen properly. When fermented on the skins for extended periods of time, it extracts big vinifera-type flavors with great aging potential.

The superior wines of Chambourcin can be big and aromatic, with a solid tannin structure and a rich complex flavor that has a great berry/jammy flavor profile. The wine blends well with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Frac because it softens these wines, but it can also be used to beef up the tannin structure and increase complexity of lighter wines. (Note that there is some conflicting opinions here, as many consider Chambourcin to be light in tannins.)

If you are considering growing Chambourcin, it is known to be extremely resistant to fungal disease and is also very hardy. It is suggested that crop thinning can help reduce the acidity that is often associated with the wine, especially in colder regions. Also, to increase the mouthfeel, many winemakers add tannins to the wines. It appears that the best time to add tannins may be post fermentation to keep the added tannins from being pulled out of the wine during fermentation due to protein-tannin binding complexes.

Some flavors that you may note: Black cherry, black pepper, crushed gravel, wet loam, and chocolate with high acidity and low tannin.