

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.  
VITICULTURAL STATION, RUTHERGLEN,  
VICTORIA. FIRST STEPS IN  
AMPELOGRAPHY: A GUIDE TO  
FACILITATE THE RECOGNITION OF VINES**

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# FIRST STEPS IN AMPELOGRAPHY:

A GUIDE TO FACILITATE THE RECOGNITION OF VINES,

BY

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## INTRODUCTION.

### NOTES ON THE DETERMINATION OF CÉPAGES.\*

A long association with vines enables any one to acquire, in a given district, a visual recollection of the most common varieties, or "cépages." This visual recollection is preferable to the best description. It is due to the physiognomy of a variety becoming engraved on the memory, and serving as a means of comparison. This physiognomy of a vine is the general result of the impression caused by the union of its separate characters. But, more often than not, these particular or separate characters, not having been examined individually with sufficient attention, escape from the memory. From their assembled characteristics a special appearance proper to each cépage results, which in most cases is sufficient to serve as a guide.

This method of determination is the result of unconscious discrimination. Vine-growers easily recognise at first sight the varieties amongst which they live, such a method of observation has a close analogy to that which enables a shepherd to recognise individual sheep in his flock. It is recommendable, but presents, however, serious difficulties. First, it demands a long time to acquire; and second, can only apply to a given district or region. Climate, cultural proceedings, and method of training, all tend to modify the appearance of a vine, and may even render it unrecognisable. An Aramon vine growing in the plains of the Hérault (South of France) will differ in appearance from the same vine when cultivated

\* This word is used as it has no true equivalent in the English language. It is usually translated as *variety*; this, however, does not convey the real meaning, as it may be applied to a species, variety, variation, hybrid, or metis. (Trans.)

in a cooler region. The various systems of pruning and training also accentuate the differences in the aspect of a vine. All these changes greatly diminish the advantage of a recollection of the general physiognomy. It is therefore necessary to seek for more rapid means, permitting the formation of the visual image of a variety in the mind to be hastened, capable of furnishing a control to the first unconscious impressions.

The method which seems indicated at first sight, is the study of the lengthy descriptions given in general works on ampelography. These works, as is commonly known, enter into details with minute exactitude. But they require a certain initiation, and the scientific pre-occupation of the authors gives an impression of dryness to beginners.

There is another means in actual use in several Schools of Viticulture in Europe, where students are encouraged to visit labelled collections of vines every day. Thanks to these collections, students can now, in the course of a single summer, learn to recognise most varieties. They arrive at this result by examining every week, if not every day, the varieties indicated to them by the teacher, who explains the partial characters. In other cases, when the characters are not given by the teacher, the students are required to find, without assistance, the salient and distinctive features. Once possessed of these characters, they very soon learn to recognise almost all the American stocks, and some of the European vines. After this, it is simply a question of frequency of visits to the collection of vines.

This method leads to a final result comparable to that obtained by the vine-grower after many years' sojourn amongst his vines. But the course pursued is quite inverse. The vigneron waits till the impression forms in his mind, and it is only accidentally that he is able to pass from the general characters to details. In the case of the student, on the contrary, it is the special points which at first attract

his attention, and rapidly contribute to form a general impression. These special points also enable the student to pass, from the first impression, to the determination of characters peculiar to each organ of the vine.

It is indispensable that special characters, whether indicated by the teacher or gathered by the student from an examination of the cépage, should be entered in a note-book. This is a valuable aid to the memory, and subsequent visits to the vines enable the number of these characters to be increased, or to usefully modify those which were first written down.

These partial characters must never be neglected. To forget them may lead to grave mistakes. As a matter of fact, after having seen a particular cépage several times, one is able to recognise it at first sight, for at this moment the visual image commences to fix itself on the memory. A tendency to think that the cépage will always be recognised, because it has been recognised once, commences to assert itself. The partial characters become disregarded or forgotten. The certainty of being able to distinguish a cépage without any definite control constitutes a risk which may lead to gross errors. To identify a cépage without being able to give the reason is not sufficient. It is absolutely necessary, to act precisely, to be able to state definitely how it is recognised.

A note-book may be lost, or one may even forget to take notes. This little guide only aims at replacing the note-book.

**General Aspect.**—The spreading, bushy, or more or less erect habit of a vine is an excellent indication. The first point of verification must not be neglected whenever the mode of culture permits its observance. Amongst a collection of American and European vines, cultivated without stakes or trellis, it is easy, by the observation of this particular, to effect a preliminary classification.



For instance, in a vineyard planted with Aramon, Carignane, and Mataro, it is possible by this means to recognise these three varieties. The Aramon is spreading, the Mataro very erect, and the Carignane is intermediate in habit between the Aramon and Mataro.

The general colour also furnishes useful indications. When looking out of a railway carriage it is easy to distinguish, amongst Aramon or Carignane, blocks of Jacquez or Petit-Bouschet (Tinto). The Jacquez forms a sombre green patch, while the Petit-Bouschet appears of a violet-green colour, as if the vines had been plunged into a bath of dye.

These characters, as well as others, seen from a distance, and resulting from the colour, general dimensions, and state of the surface of the leaves (shining or downy), only serve to create an impression.

**Wood.**—The autumn (ripe) wood affords precise characters. The Riparia wood is easily distinguished from that of Rupestris or Berlandieri. And in a given species it is easy to recognise different varieties by an examination of the autumn canes. The wood of Riparia Gloire is very distinct from that of Riparia Violet. The wood of Grenache does not resemble that of Chasselas. But the characters observed in the appearance of the wood always present a difficulty. The variations have too small an amplitude. These characters are useful in the differentiation of one species from another, and in a given species to facilitate the recognition of varieties in which the appearance of the autumn canes differs in regard to one another. But, to mention one instance, how can we distinguish the wood of Riparia Grand Glabre from that of another Riparia with red wood? This reproach may be addressed to ampelography in general. But if it is true in the case of leaves and grapes, it is even more so in the case of the canes.

Other inconveniences may be added to this difficulty. Winter is not a season for strolling amongst vines. It is often necessary to examine wood that has been cut for some time and stratified in sand, and therefore of modified colour. The colour of ripened wood varies sensibly according to the nature of the soil the vine is grown in. The wood of *Riparia Gloire* cultivated in fertile alluvial plains, where the growth is very strong, has not the same colour as the wood of the same *Riparia* cultivated in clay soils or on poor and dry hills.

To ascertain that the colour is variable is sufficient to be on guard against the first impression, and necessitates attentive regard to other more constant characters than colour, before asserting that the wood under observation belongs to a particular variety.

**Tendrils.**—The character drawn from the continuity or discontinuity of the tendrils is of remarkable fixity. The *Vitis Labrusca* is the only species with continuous tendrils. However, the continuity is not absolute. It is rare, on the contrary, not to find a few interruptions on each cane, especially in proximity to the point of insertion, where the tendrils are invariably absent.

The disposition of the tendrils of *Labrusca* hybrids is intermediate between those of *Vitis Labrusca* and those of other *Vitis*. According to the degree of relationship the interruptions are rare or frequent. For example, the *Vialla* has tendrils almost as continuous as those of *V. Labrusca*.

**Buds at the First Start of Growth.**—The appearance of the budding of certain species is very distinctive, but differs only slightly between the varieties of a given species. The evolution of the young buds is so rapid that the modifications are produced at short intervals. The distinctive characters at that period of growth are slight and very variable. This difficulty lasts until the leaves have attained their final dimensions.

The verification of the precocity of bursting of the buds may, in certain circumstances, be a useful indication.

**Leaves.**—The leaves of different varieties may, in most cases, be distinguished from one another. It sometimes happens that the leaves of a given cépage present partial resemblances, in regard to shape, texture, and pubescence, to those of another cépage, but the coincidence of all these characters is not frequent.

At the end of May,\* the leaves possess characters which are maintained without much modification till autumn. They may therefore be studied during the whole summer. This contributes, in a great measure, to the possibility of distinguishing the cépages.

**Upper Portion of Growing Shoot.**—This denomination is applied to the portion of the shoot in a state of active growth, comprised between the free extremity and the point where the young leaves have attained, more or less, one-third of their normal development. The characters drawn from this are excellent. They always serve as a direct control of the observation made by means of the leaves. These characters disappear naturally when the active growth ceases.

**Grapes.**—When eating a Chasselas grape, we do not suppose for a moment that it is a Berlandieri grape or the product of any of the new hybrids; we may, therefore, use the grape as an excellent ampelographic character. But grapes, when they have arrived at maturity, do not remain long on the vine, as they are gathered at that moment. Again, to speak only of one group, a black spherical berry resembles very closely another black spherical berry, and they are legion in each group. Slight variations in colour and size are difficult to detect. The general shape of the

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\* About November in Victoria. (Trans.)