

RESISTING AGES-OLD FIXITY AS A FACTOR IN WINE QUALITY

Colonial wine tours and Australia's early wine industry

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Abstract

A leading Australian wine writer agrees with wine scientists that it is possible to make wines “that taste of where they’re from” but argues that Australian growers focus more on regionality than the micro-sites of *terroir* (Allen, 2010: 19–20). It is ironic, then, that the most successful Australian export wines are cross-regional blends with consistent taste rather than aroma, bouquet or flavour discernable from discrete places (Banks et al., 2007: 33). Some Australian fine wine producers see this subversion of the perceived value of regionality as a barrier to greater industry success and are focusing on connection to soil as an indicator of wine quality; identifying family links with “patches of dirt” to emphasis the heritage of their wines (Lofts, 2010: vx). But my argument here is that the Australian industry is still so young compared with Old World wine regions that a seemingly natural balance of wine and place—exemplified in the notion of *terroir*—is still taking shape. The genesis of the Australian wine industry lay in movement rather than fixity as colonists brought plant stock, and vine growing and wine making knowledge, from the Old World to the New.

Keywords

wine history, Australian colonial history, Australian agricultural history, environmental history

Introduction

There can be little doubt of the value of soils in determining the distinctive qualities of fine wine (Sommers, 2008: 60–82). What is problematic is proclaiming the primacy of soil alone, even within the complex combination of soils, microclimate and aspect called *terroir* (Robinson, 2006: 692). Privileging soil above all else as a determinant of the quality of wine negates human agency in wine production; it obscures the ages-old experimentation that has taken place in Europe and the origin of the cultural construction that some land, particularly in France, is inherently of better quality than land elsewhere (Guy, 2001: 164). The creation of a wine industry in Australia required transplantation of the wine grape species *vitis vinifera* as well as acquisition of knowledge and plant stock from Europe and European colonial wine regions. This transmission from place to place proved to be a necessary feature of the development of wine growing in Australia and its eventual success is testimony to the persistence and ingenuity of early advocates of the creation of a colonial industry at the geographical edge of the British Empire.

At the time of the British invasion of Eora lands on the south-east coast of Australia, hundreds of cultivars (or varieties) of *vitis vinifera* grew successfully in regions of Europe and European colonies but nowhere within the British Empire (Dunstan, 1994: 3). The first Australian vineyards, at Sydney Cove and present-day Parramatta, were planted with vine stock purchased when the First Fleet laid over at the Cape of Good Hope, a Dutch colony established as a supply station on the sea route to the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). The Cape's so-called wine farms were established at the time of Dutch invasion of southern Africa in the mid-17th century. From 1788 in New South Wales, wine growing experiments occurred on convict-worked government farms and a few settlers' land grants. These failed however, due to a lack of reliable plant stock and skilled labour or, at the very least, knowledge. By the early 1800s it became clear that commercial-scale wine growing could not proceed

unless the requisite elements were acquired from Europe. The first elite colonist to act on this was former military officer John Macarthur. Grown rich from trade (but not yet the wool baron he would become) Macarthur undertook the first colonial wine tour, to France and Switzerland, in 1815–16 (McIntyre, 2006). His and subsequent colonial wine tours built a tradition of transmission in the genesis of the Australian wine industry.

The desire to create an Australian wine industry can be dated to the voyage of colonisation to New South Wales under the command of Arthur Phillip. In its complex cargo (human, botanical, bovine, preserved food and otherwise) the First Fleet carried wine as well as wine grape vine cuttings. A handful of officers in charge of the transported convicts also harboured conceptions of the historic and cultural value of vine cultivation and wine drinking (McIntyre, 2008: 39.3–39.5). The wine first imported to Australia came from Tenerife in the Spanish victualling colony of the Canary Islands, San Sebastian on the Rio de Janeiro (a Portuguese colony selling Portuguese wines) and the Cape. Wine continued to be imported to New South Wales after the First Fleet to the present day, including – in the early years – some of the “most approved vintages”, in addition to the notorious importation of large quantities of spirits (known generically as rum).¹

I have argued elsewhere that the desire for a colonial wine industry in New South Wales (the first Australian colony) persisted throughout the 19th century despite access to imports – and constraints to the development of successful colonial vineyards and wineries – due to the perception among the governing class that production and consumption of colonial wine had the power to “civilise the civiliser” (McIntyre, 2011: 225). That is, to make what the colonial elites perceived as the drunken working classes more sober by tempering their alcohol intake. Historian David Dunstan has identified this same faith in the ‘civilising’ powers of wine in colonial Victoria (1994: xiii). Wine growing offered symbolic and cultural as well as economic capital in much the same way Pierre Bourdieu detected a rise in the *distinction* of wine in the second half of the 20th century (1984: 53). This *distinction* will be discussed shortly along with the construction of *terroir*. But first: the role of travel in colonial knowledge acquisition.

Australian colonial travel for knowledge acquisition

As historian John Gascoigne shows, British World travel literature during the colonial era has gained increased attention from scholars largely as a means of tracing encounters between Columbian era colonisers and colonised, and to understand the complexity of Europeans' gaze upon each other (2006: 588–589). Australian views of the world through travel have been the subject of a good deal of historical research. One such area of study has focused on servicemen and women in expeditionary forces from the dispatch of New South Wales squatters' sons to Sudan in support of the British in 1885, the Boer Wars, the World Wars and up to the present war in Afghanistan (Gerster and Pierce, 1987; White, 1997). Non-military Australian tourism at home and abroad also has its historians, most notably Richard White (White et al., 2005). Rarely, however, has travel literature been used to understand the trans-European transmission of knowledge related to agriculture. A notable exception is agricultural economist Benjamin Sexauer's research on Arthur Young's journey to France in the late 18th century. Young's work in part related to comparisons of the profitability of wine growing in France versus British (non-wine growing) agricultural production and resulting land values (1976).

It seems likely the travel undertaken by Macarthur – and later James Busby, George Wyndham, Thomas Livingstone Mitchell, George Suttor, William Macarthur, James Fallon, Thomas Hardy and others – was intended to 'improve' the tourists as well as provide new tools for the Europeanisation of the Australian colonies. Gascoigne, again, has demonstrated that Enlightenment philosophies framing British colonisation of Australia encouraged optimal "improvement" of the land for human utility (2002: 85). This elite ideal co-existed with residual faith in the benefits of Grand Tours, usually of France and Italy, conducted by young British aristocrats up until the late 18th century to make them "polished and accomplished" (Cohen, 1992: 241). These ideas may well have accompanied Macarthur on his walking tour from Paris through Burgundy to Switzerland with his younger sons (seventeen year-old James and fifteen year-old William) but the main purpose was to gain knowledge of wine growing in the colonial context (Macarthur, 1844: v–vii).

Australian colonial wine tours: creating an industry through transmission

The British colonisation of New South Wales required successful development of agriculture, which in turn required close attention to soils and place. Historian Grace Karskens detected that from the outset,

the invaders were obsessed by soils... Everywhere [the governor, Arthur] Phillip and the officers voyaged they had eyes only for soils. They had an entire lexicon to describe soils. They carried little bags to take samples for testing and blending experiments – these last proving ‘fruitless’. [Marines Officer Watkin] Tench reported glumly, ‘though possibly only from want of skill on our side’. (2009: 106)

‘Skill’ would prove a considerable obstacle to realisation of the imperial imaginary imported to New South Wales with these invaders.

When Macarthur undertook his walking tour from Paris to Vevey in Switzerland, he sought to meet with Jean Jacques Dufour who had trialled wine growing in other New World soil: the United States. Dufour had studied viticulture in Europe before migrating to North America in 1796 and establishing a vineyard near Lexington, Kentucky. By 1803, Dufour had sent his brother to Washington with two five-gallon barrels of wine for President Thomas Jefferson, a great wine enthusiast. But Dufour’s enterprise had been set up with investment subscriptions and when investors stopped paying due to disappointing returns the business had to be wound up. In 1806, Dufour returned to Europe to raise the money to settle his family’s debts in the United States and it was 1817 before he could return. In 1827, the year before he died, Dufour published the first American book on viticulture, *The American Vine-Dresser’s Guide* (Pinney, 1989: 121–122).

On 9 April 1815, John Macarthur senior wrote to son John – the family’s business agent in London – that fortunately Dufour and his family in Vevey, Switzerland had:

not commenced Pruning their vines in the vineyards... So that I shall have an opportunity of seeing the whole process of pruning, planting and preparing the soil. The method which they adopt, is the same as that practiced in Burgundy and the... Provinces where the choicest wines are produced, altho the Wine here is of very inferior quality – this inferiority is attributable to the Soil, aspect, climate and other unknown causes, and not to the want of [expertise] in the Culture of the Vine.²

Macarthur's conviction that vineyard location played a more significant role in wine quality than human agency may have been the result of a rationale for observing winemaking in a region less valued for its wine production *or* a belief in the higher suitability of French soil for wine growing *or* both.

According to young James Macarthur's unpublished diary, his father gleaned from Dufour that his American vineyard had finally succeeded "by dint of perseverance."³ Nearly thirty years later William revealed that once back in France, "About thirty of the best varieties of the vine (from six to twelve cuttings or plants of each)... were collected in the vineyards in which they grew and taken from the vines, in most instances, literally under our eyes [including] the best varieties" from the Languedoc, Côte Rôtie and the Côte d'Or (Macarthur, 1844: v-vii). On the return voyage to New South Wales, the Macarthurs' ship took on supplies at the Portuguese colony of Madeira but pruning in the vineyards – which would have made cuttings available for purchase immediately – was long over so his father instead ordered "several tubs of the best varieties of wine grapes" (ibid: vi). After all this effort, however, the vines that later arrived in Sydney from France and Madeira were not the range of varieties the Macarthurs expected. This did not become evident until the vines, planted over more than an acre in 1820, bore fruit three years after they were planted. Not only were there fewer varieties, and none of them valuable, but the wine from them was poor. "In short", wrote William, "although the vines flourished, the vineyard seemed to be a failure, and ignorant of the true cause, we were half inclined to give the matter up" (ibid: vii). Instead of quitting, the youngest Macarthur son proceeded, with Dufourian 'perseverance', to oversee the planting of fruitful vineyards at Camden Park and, in future, when the Macarthurs imported vine stocks they used different methods. James and elder brother Edward later successfully lobbied the

British Government's Secretary of State for the Colonies to approve the sponsored migration of (mostly Catholic) German vinedressers to work the Macarthur vineyard in the late 1830s. When a second group of vinedressers was sponsored to migrate in 1842, William requested that they bring tools and vine cuttings.⁴

As William watched his first colonial vines grow through their infant seasons, a former convict turned respected surgeon also visited Madeira. Like most colonial wine growers in this period, Dr William Redfern dabbled in vines as a hobby while pursuing more profitable pastoral interests (Driscoll, 1969: 25). Redfern had been transported to New South Wales as a convicted mutineer in 1801 but a shortage of medical skills resulted in his employment to attend to other convicts and he quickly received a pardon. He went on to care for the families of Elizabeth and John Macarthur and Governor Lachlan Macquarie. His connection to Macquarie and outspoken advocacy against restrictions to convicts' rights led him to deliver a petition to the king in the 1820s, which is how he came to be at Madeira, on the return journey to Sydney (Ford, 1967: 368–371). Redfern stayed in Madeira to recover his health and while there “engaged Vine Dressers and procured Vines... at considerable expence [sic], to proceed to New South Wales for the purpose of cultivating the Vine.”⁵ The vines Redfern imported were likely verdelho, the highly-prized main grape of cultivation at Madeira, a variety also imported in 1825 by the Australian Agricultural Company (Busby, 1825: 42). The Portuguese family hired by Redfern to work his vines has sadly vanished into the crowd of nameless working class migrants whose stories can now be only imagined.

While Redfern petitioned on behalf of emancipists, the second of the great colonial Australian wine tours of Europe began. James Busby travelled to France, perhaps knowingly in the footsteps of the Macarthurs, and certainly well-read in preparation. The young Scotsman had studied agriculture. He also knew of the British House of Lords report on the demand for wine in India which he thought New South Wales wine could fill. Busby translated into English a few of the thirty or so French publications on vine growing and wine making of the time (ibid: xxvi). He also perused John Macarthur's copy of Dufour's narrative on wine growing in Kentucky.⁶ During his stay in France, Busby lived in Cadillac on the banks of the Garonne,

across river from the more famous wine districts of Sauternes, Barsac and Preignac (ibid: xix).

After conducting his research in France, the long voyage from England to New South Wales provided Busby with time to synthesise the knowledge gained into the work he published as *A Treatise on the Culture of the Vine and the Art of Making Wine; compiled from the works of Chaptal, and other French writers; and from the notes of the compiler, during a residence in some of the wine provinces of France* (1825). He also visited the Cape of Good Hope, including the famous Constantia wine farm (Ramsden, 1840: 369). Less of a travelogue than his later *Journal of a Tour, Through some of the Vineyards of Spain and France* (1833), it is difficult to draw out from the *Treatise* what Busby saw during his peregrinations rather than what he gleaned from reading Chaptal and other French writers on viticulture and viniculture. His stated observations are limited to the effects of frost in vineyards, the bonfires used to keep the vines warm to prevent frost damage and the grape crush in unnamed wine cellars (Busby, 1825: 109–110, 137).

Busby's *Treatise* was the first English-language wine growing manual of the period. In it he noted that instruction manuals in French could be distilled to the idea that to become a vigneron required a preparedness to observe *existing* practices. He summed up the message of the French instructive literature as follows:

You have, already, extensive and excellent vineyards [in France], and in the lapse of ages, each variety has found out the soil and situation which fits it best, or has become naturalized to the climate and soil where it grows. Choose your plants from the best in your own neighbourhood, attend to their cultivation, and to the fermentation of your wine, and you will have the best your land is capable of producing. (ibid: 38–9)

What Busby recognised here can be understood not only as the foundations of the later codified quality of *terroir* but also an embedded *habitus*; the Bourdieuan concept of disposition which holds that human action and reaction in response to

structural forces such as the natural environment results in an interaction between “meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions” (Young, 2004: 202).

Busby had a classic Enlightenment-era disregard for obstacles to enterprise such as a lack of knowledge or heritage. As such, he addressed concerns colonists may have about the transmission of knowledge and plant stock to the New World versus the seeming fixity of the Old World wine industries. He drew attention to the fact that although European wine grapes seemed to have been established since time out of mind they were not indigenous to Western Europe and had first come from *other* places (1825: 41). He recognised that, while the French enjoyed the legacy of two thousand years of wine growing heritage, the best early 19th century wines came from vines imported from elsewhere hundreds of years earlier. In sharing this with his readers Busby foreshadowed the challenge Australian wine growers would face in being part of an industry whose recent history means it can trace its documented setbacks as readily as its successes. This transparency prevented an impression that wine growing had a seamless, natural affinity with Australian soils compared with the apparent fixity of European, or Old World, wine industries. Cypriot wines, said Busby, were considered the best in the world in the 15th century and the prized Madeira, Malmsey and Malaga wines of the 18th and 19th centuries (in Madeira, the Canary Islands, Hungary and other places) were of vines originally imported from Cyprus. French vines too came from Greece. And besides, Busby continued, due to the need to re-plant vines too old to bear fruit, some French grape vines were only 25 to 30 years old (*ibid*: 41, 48). The implication being that sites might have been established as suitable in Old World wine regions but the actual vines had no grander heritage than those in New South Wales derived from valued vineyards abroad.

The northern Autumn of 1830 found Busby in Spain and then France collecting vine stock. His intention was to gather as many varieties as possible of high and low quality wine grapes and raisin grapes, to advance experimentation. “It might at first appear superfluous to bestow attention on a collection which must include many of a very inferior description”, he wrote to Whitehall seeking assistance with the cost of transporting the vines to Sydney. But, “it is perhaps the most remarkable fact

connected with the culture of the Vine that even a slight change of Climate or Soil produces a most material change in the qualities of its produce”.⁷ The best varieties in Europe might prove valueless in New South Wales, and vice versa. Busby “spared no trouble or expense in obtaining all the varieties of the different districts through which he travelled” (Busby, 1833: 5). He felt that since knowledge and vine stock had until then been sourced from colder climates than New South Wales his tour of European wine regions should encompass climates similar to that of the colony (ibid: 2). In the *Journal*, an account of Busby’s four-month second tour, he went on to communicate his knowledge about vine growing acquired in the past few years as well as impressions of sites, soils, vine care and wine making.

Sadly, however, Busby’s carefully assembled collection of vine stock suffered a similar ignominious reduction to the Macarthurs’ vines fifteen years earlier: in this case fewer stocks were shipped than had been ordered from the Royal Nursery of the Luxembourg in Paris (ibid). Then, like so many European plants sent to colonial Australia in this era, Busby’s entire Spanish collection “perished” during the voyage, most likely due to less than ideal conditions for rooted plants. Ironically, the surviving vines from France were varieties identified with Spain and Portugal rather than noble French types.⁸ William Macarthur would later comment that while Busby had done the colony a great service in creating the collection of vines he lodged with the Botanic Gardens in Sydney, as little as a sixth of the collection was of any genuine worth as a supply of reliable, noble (fine wine/exportable) vine stock to prospective growers (Macarthur: 18).

Knowledge of botany may seem to have been an advantage in solving the mysteries of wine growing but botanist George Suttor struggled just as much as other early colonists to produce wine grapes successfully in New South Wales (Suttor, 1843: 18). Before migrating to New South Wales, the Romantic Suttor imagined “converting the wilderness into a fruitful garden and building a new life with his childhood sweetheart” (Parsons, 1967: 498–500). He arrived in Sydney the same year as Redfern and, as a protégée of leading botanist Joseph Banks, had charge of a large collection of plants Banks sent to the colony in a specially-designed cabin. These plants included either cuttings or rootlings of grape vines and when Suttor reported to

Banks on the state of the collection he usually mentioned the grape vines first.⁹ When all of the plants in the purpose-built cabin died en route, Suttor had to purchase replacements at the Cape which meant grape growing trials in New South Wales continued to rely largely on plant stock from the Cape rather than from Europe via the plant nurseries of Britain.¹⁰

After Suttor's failures with wine grape cultivation in his first years in the colony, better results were achieved from the 1830s. In 1840 he took an extended tour of European wine regions with his wife and daughter which doubled as an experience in the intellectual tradition of viewing beautiful scenery. "In our travels in France to see the vines, the vintage and the picturesque, I observed that the land is not so highly cultivated as in England, except where the vines are planted," he wrote (Suttor: 83). His tour was chronicled as diary entries interspersed with extracts of translations from contemporary works on wine in *The Culture of the Grape-Vine, and the Orange, in Australia and New Zealand: Comprising Historical Notices; Instructions for Planting and Cultivation; Accounts, from Personal Observation, Of the Vineyards of France and the Rhine; and Extracts concerning all the most celebrated wines from the work of M. Jullien* (1843). Suttor hoped his book would persuade British migrants to invest in wine growing in colonial Australia and New Zealand (ibid: iv-v).

Suttor's practiced botanical eye noticed soil types, vine height, trellising methods, colour and size of grapes as well as the broader beauty of French locales. "I have seen the vine-covered hills and plains of Bourgogne," he wrote, "and have thought that I would rejoice to see the hills and plains for Parramatta and Bathurst, to the same extent, covered with vines". The great age of the moss-covered vines in many of the stone-walled vineyards of the Bourgogne evoked gravitas; "they venerate the vine in France" (ibid: 71-72). In early October 1840, Suttor visited vineyards on the left bank of the Rhine at Bonn. Again he took very close notice of the wine grapes and their care. He commented on details such as the neatness and cleanliness of the tubs used to carry harvested grapes. He saw that women were involved in picking the grapes, men in carrying and crushing them and the conviviality of the scene impressed him. In 1842, Suttor returned to France to visit Chateau Margaux. Here he observed and recorded details of the vintage (ibid: 50-56, 130-134).

From a colonist occupied with the botanical colonisation of New South Wales we turn to a British-Australian who defined the borders of the colony within which Indigenous Australians were coerced to accept patterns of European land use and the native landscape ‘improved’. Surveyor Thomas Livingstone Mitchell’s gardener had purchased seven thousand vine cuttings from William Macarthur in the mid-1840s and a French vinedresser was hired to tend them.¹¹ In 1847, Mitchell returned to England and took the opportunity to tour through the Spanish region of Andalusia making practical observations. Two years later, on his return to the colony, he circulated his slim, illustrated and well-received report on vines and other Mediterranean fruits which the Botanical and Horticultural Society of Sydney published as *Notes on the Cultivation of the Vine &c., in Spain* (1849).

Returning to Europe in 1854, Mitchell and James Macleay, another prominent colonist, visited Cape wine farms and noted methods of cultivation and vinification. Mitchell recorded in his journal that the vines were not staked or trellised (as opposed to German and Greek practices), leaves were removed at a certain time to promote ripening and many grapes remained on the vine until very ripe and shrivelled. After harvest the berries were crushed by foot, no spirit was added to the must; sulphur prevented a second fermentation of the wine.¹² In 1855, William Macarthur too returned to Europe, as Commissioner of the New South Wales exhibit at the Paris Exhibition. He toured vineyards in France, Switzerland and northern Italy: “Clos Vaugeot, Romanee Conti, Romanee St Vivant, Richebourg, La Tache St George, etc, producing the finest wines” (in Kelly, 1861: 34). The desire persisted, then, to collect knowledge through observation from the ‘finest’ sites to transplant these ideas in Australia. George Wyndham, who established Australia’s oldest, continually operating vineyard—Wyndham Estate in the Hunter Valley—had undertaken a wine tour before he migrated to New South Wales in 1827 but family historians are still searching for details of the journey.¹³

Looking towards the end of the late 19th century: wine tours were undertaken by James Fallon of New South Wales and Thomas Hardy from South Australia. Both contributed significantly to forging pathways for colonial wine exports to Britain. Fallon petitioned against prejudices preventing import of colonial wines with a high-

level of naturally-occurring alcohol as well as travelling extensively through wine countries (Driscoll, 1972: 151). Hardy, for his part, must be considered one of the most accomplished of colonial wine producers and exporters, as well as being a marvellous writer of his wine travels (Hardy, 1885; Hardy, 1899).

By the end of the 19th century colonial wine tours had become an established practice. George Graham, part-owner of Netherby Vineyard at Rutherglen, near the New South Wales-Victoria border, travelled through England and France and “as usual with Australian vigneron when travelling, kept his eyes open for anything of interest to the industry.” He spent his time in France “in the Southern and Medoc districts, chiefly at Montpellier”, where several Australians had by this stage studied viticulture. Graham observed the vast extent of vineyards, methods of vine cultivation and the successful recovery from the grape phylloxera plague. He had arrived after vintage and “The new wine – not two months old – was being delivered for the purchasers, the roads being lined with long drays, holding five to seven barriques of 120gal each.” In a clear representation of the very small degree to which wine growing occurred in Australia compared with Europe at this time, Graham saw that “Railway stations were blocked with wine as ours are with wheat”. It did represent a colonial advancement, however, that Graham’s journey could be called, in the Melbourne newspaper report of it in 1897, “a vigneron’s tour” (my emphasis).¹⁴ Colonial Australian vigneron by this time warranted a discursive nod though their existence but, as Busby knew decades earlier, the creation of European wine production had been far less transparent than in Australian wine. Time had cleansed the European story of memories of failure (and of individual pioneers) which allowed a strong mythology to evolve around the suitability of vineyard sites. Out of this mythologising came the formalisation of the notion of *terroir* and its link to fixed locations and seemingly immutable places as the most suitable to grow wine grapes.

***Terroir*: wine and fixity**

The French-derived term *terroir* – formalised in the system of *appellations d’origine* [AOC] – has significant discursive power. Ostensibly *terroir* means “an area or terrain... whose soil and microclimate impart distinctive qualities to food products...

and wine” but it is, in fact, value-laden and related “to a time of much less spatial mobility, when changed occurred at a slower pace... resulted from long occupation of the same area and represented the interplay of human ingenuity and curiosity with the natural givens of a place” (Barham, 2006: 131). Certain vineyard sites “have been imbued with the power to produce distinctive wines, particularly in Europe” (Banks et al., 2007: 16), and these distinctions bring a hegemonic mystique of vineyard/region/place to the consumer, wherever they are in the world. *Terroir* continues to be reified in the discourse of wine appreciation and wine consumption. British wine writer Jancis Robinson holds that *terroir* can be understood as the “total natural environment”, soil, microclimate, aspect and so on, of a single vineyard or definable region and fine wines are primarily understood as products of specific *terroir* (2006: 692).

The formalisation of French myth-making with respect to wine came with the announcement of the Bordeaux Classifications of Wine at the first Paris Exhibition in 1855, at which Australian colonial wines had, incidentally, shown surprisingly well (McIntyre, 2007: 436–438). Before this, classifications of wine quality within regions began as early as the 15th century in southwest France and later in (what would become) Germany and Hungary. Then, in 1855, in response to a request from Napoleon III, Bordeaux wine brokers formalised existing classes of *crus*, or growths, of the Médoc region on a scale from *premier* (first) to fifth (Robinson: 175–178). These classifications have been highly influential in constructing a hegemonic and enduring sense of the value of quality French wines internationally (Ulin: 522). During periods of prosperity post-World War II, possession of *premier crus*—wines from Châteaux Lafite, Margaux, Latour and Haut-Brion (and, since 1973, Châteaux Mouton-Rothschild)—has become connected to high socio-cultural status in the western, and increasingly eastern, worlds. Food critic Michael Steinberger argues that the material and cultural value of *premier cru* has resisted even the recent collapse of the primacy of French cuisine and the dilution of the reliability of AOC as a marker of quality (2009: 148–161). Moreover, despite the erosion of the primacy of French cuisine and dilution of quality control in the AOC, some wines from south western France remain the most desirable and most expensive on the international market. While the wine commands such respect, its *terroir* remains of great value.

The power of fine wine can be understood within the Bourdieuan concept of ‘good taste’ and status or *distinction*. Bourdieu argued that the creation of *distinction* could be demonstrated in the discursive circular co-relation between the imagery evoked by Château Margaux, a first growth wine, and the aristocratic architectural grandeur of the chateau attached to the vineyard. He saw this as epitomised in the following passage, in a 1973 edition of a French art magazine, by Eveline Schlumberger, a member of the Alsatian wine family of Domaines Schlumberger:

In each case [she wrote] the same words spring to one’s lips: elegance, distinction, delicacy and that subtle satisfaction given by something which has received the most attentive and indeed loving care for generations. A wine long matured, a house long inhabited: Margaux the vintage and Margaux the château are the product of two equally rare things: rigour and time. (in Bourdieu, 1984: 53; Bourdieu’s emphasis)

But, in exploring the cultural capital of wine from southwest France, anthropologist Robert Ulin found the power of the link between wine, elite culture and place to be even greater than Bourdieu discerned in representations such as Schlumberger’s. Ulin contends that the perceived superiority of wines from and near the Bordeaux is an invented tradition. Essentially,

the current status of southwest French wines follows conjointly from their political and economic history and a process of invention that links place and individual property with the authenticity and quality of wine. Moreover, the invention of the winegrowing past contributed to the naturalization of conditions and criteria that are fundamentally social and historical. This, in turn, has reinforced social distinctions between growers and provided elites with cultural capital that is widely regarded as authoritative. (Ulin: 526)

Linked to this is the ideological evolution of the land/place-based ruralism, protectionism and nationalism inherent in the French idea of *terroir*, which has been described as follows. “Led by French fine wine producers”, argues Kolleen Guy,

regional agricultural interests demanded a system of appellations d'origine [AOC] – state-sanctioned controls of the use of names that evoked a geographic place of origin... Under pressure from the provinces, a series of bills were introduced in the National Assembly between 1905 and 1908 to protect regional appellations by ending adulteration and fraud within the wine industry. This legislation unleashed an intense debate that extended beyond wine production to include other foodstuffs linked to a delimited geographical area, what became later known as terroir. This ruralist and protectionist discourse elevated the land and its products to a 'central part of every Frenchman's legacy'. (Guy, 2001: 164)

Ideas of wine as a commodity rooted in place have become inextricably linked to French national identity which Guy states has been largely unacknowledged by historians, who usually concentrate on patterns of wine consumption rather than production, and geographers, who map the cultural landscape of viticulture.

Geographic indicators were formalised as AOC laws as recently as the 1930s and then marshalled in the late 20th century to protect European Union producers in places such as Champagne, Burgundy and Roquefort. Yet,

we still understand relatively little about how wine's symbolic power was invoked at the local and national levels as part of a construction of "Frenchness" during a crucial period for the emergence of a mass, consumer culture and the creation of national consciousness. (ibid: 164)

Concern over the extent to which these geographic indicators are deterministic constructions in service of the French nationalist narrative has led to an antipodean attempt to redefine *terroir*. In preference to “place-rootedness”, Banks et al. use the definition that *terroir* is “a complex representation of social identity, a set of regulatory conventions, a marketing strategy, and a set of physical relationships brought into being by human intervention” (Banks et al., 2007: 18). But, like terms with a seemingly universal logic, such as ‘democracy’, it is not surprising that the word *terroir* cannot simply be excised of its historical-cultural meaning in favour of a less value-laden alternative. In the case of Banks et al., it has been adapted to shift but not remove its hierarchical implications. I say ‘shift’ since a study of the role of

place in wine labelling in Australia and New Zealand concludes that “it is possible to read much more about the structure of the industry in different places from the front labels of the wine bottle than we can necessarily about place” (ibid: 33). This group of geographers emphasise the New Zealand focus on regionality and quality above the Australian wine industry’s characteristic use of cross-regional wine grape variety blends to achieve wines of lower price and higher year-to-year flavour consistency. The inference is that New Zealand wines have a greater authenticity for their stronger regional focus. That is, they have a closer, more virtuous relationship to singly-identifiable and unique soils than those of Australian wines.

In response to views such as this, twelve Australian wine making families with established heritage in wine growing are seeking to move beyond the Australian reputation as a producer of low quality, multi-regional wine. To promote the idea of regional heroism the families commissioned Graeme Loft’s *Heart and Soul: Australia’s First Families of Wine* (2010). The book’s cover shows a working man’s soil-encrusted hands holding a young grape vine leaf to emphasise the families’ roots in Australian land and place. Similarly, the back cover of wine writer Max Allen’s plea for continued development of sustainable wine growing in Australia, *The Future Makers: Australian Wines for the 21st Century* (2010), features a pair of male, dirt-stained hands; less soil but still a strong inference that care of the land is ‘in the hands’ of the whole industry and of consumers who choose sustainably-produced wines. As Allen explains, Australian wine scientists and writers agree that it is possible to make wines “that taste of where they’re from” but *terroir* as micro-sites has been of less importance to Australian wine growers who have access to a climates and soils. For Australians, according to Allen, regionality has been a greater focus (ibid: 19–20).

Terroir, place and naming wines in the colonial context

Australian wine producers’ difficult relationship with the idea of *terroir* is almost as old as attempts to grow wine grapes in Australian soil. The word *terroir* appeared in colonial wine discourse from the 1840s as a means of distinguishing wines from each other, that is, as “the natural *goût de terroir*, or that arising from the nature of the soil itself”.¹⁵ But, by the late 19th century it came to represent a pejorative British World

descriptor for colonial wines compared with more highly prized European wines. Instead of a distinctive flavour of a region, in reference to colonial Australian wines, *goût de terroir* came to mean “earthy”; literally tasting *like* soil as opposed to *of the soil* of its region. In the second half of the century, colonial wine growers debated how to remove this flaw, which particularly afflicted red wines. Likely the most accurate assessment of the problem came from colonial wine expert, Reverend Joseph Bleasdale, who attributed it to under-skilled wine making practices.¹⁶ But *goût de terroir* overshadowed Australian wine making ambitions until the early 20th century.

Tellingly, in 1908, a brief story in at least three newspapers on the same day announced that a special report of British wine buyers had tasted colonial Australian wines at the Franco-Britain Exhibition and declared them a “remarkable improvement”.

*There is a notable absence in the New South Wales wines, observes the committee, of the unpleasant "terroir," or earthy taste, which is frequently present in Australian wine. The report speaks highly of Australian brandies, and less favorably of white wines, burgundies, hocks, and sparkling wines.*¹⁷

Note that the reference to wine types still referred to place: burgundies and hocks could only be imitations of French and German wines. This taxonomical confusion has long undermined the development of Australian viticulture (Walker and Thomas, 2009: 78–80).

In the late 18th century, one writer tried to untangle the knots of wine taxonomy in an encyclopaedia entry explaining that wines were distinguished by several means:

with regard to their colour into white wine, red wine, claret wine, pale wine, rose, or black wine; and with regard to their country, or the soil that produces them, into French wines, Spanish wines, Rhenish wines, Hungary wines, Greek wines, Canary wines, &.. and more particularly into Port wine, Madeira wine, Burgundy wine, Champaign wine, Falurnian wine, Tockay wine, Schires wine, &c . (Unattributed, 1759: 550–551)

The effect of naming of wine for European place, rather than the grape variety or varieties it is made from, contributed to the multitude of obstacles faced by early Australian wine growers. Imagine the difficulty in producing colonial ‘claret’ when claret from Bordeaux sold into the British market comprised a blend of grape varieties and potentially various post-fermentation substances added by vintners. *Goût de terroir* might be long gone and Australian wines are now most often named for their constituent varieties but there have recently been echoes of the centuries-old challenge to navigate the taxonomical labyrinth of ampelography with the revelation that plantings of ‘Albarino’ grapes in Australia are actually the little known variety Savagnin Blanc (Walker and Thomas: 78).

Conclusion

While the idea of *terroir* is useful for wine consumers seeking distinctiveness through a ‘taste of the soil’, the hierarchy of the world’s *terroir* implicit in the term’s French nationalist origins are much less relevant for Australia’s wine industry. An Australian wine may speak of soil and place or it may suit consumers because it lacks complexity due to cross-regional blending. Either way its history comprehends successful transmission of plant stock and knowledge – with full recognition of the role of human agency – in bringing *vitis vinifera* to a new place.

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Endnotes

¹ For example, Cape wine was advertised in *Sydney Gazette*, 19 November 1828; wine from Tenerife: *Sydney Gazette*, 3 December 1828. Quote from *Sydney Gazette*, 17 November 1828; see

also *Sydney Gazette*, 19 September 1828 and 14 November 1828. No prices are listed in the advertisements.

² John Macarthur (senior) to John Macarthur (junior), 9 April 1815, Macarthur Papers, Mitchell Library Manuscript (ML) A2899, 1, State Library of New South Wales.

³ James Macarthur, Unpublished Journal, 12 March 1815 to 28 April 1816, Macarthur Papers, ML A2929, no page numbers.

⁴ Edward Macarthur to James and William Macarthur, 7 November 1842, Macarthur Papers, ML A2918: 267; Germans on Bounty Ships 1849–1852, 4/4820, AO Microfiche 851, State Records Office of New South Wales.

⁵ Sarah Redfern on behalf of William Redfern to Earl Bathurst, 1824, Frederick Watson (ed.) *Historical Records of Australia (HRA)* (Sydney: Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1919) s1 v11: 203. Redfern's return from England via Madeira and his import of vines, fruit trees and pure-bred sheep is mentioned in *Sydney Gazette*, 22 July 1824.

⁶ Gregory Blaxland to John Thomas Bigge, 28 November 1815, ML Bigge Appendix, Bonwick transcripts Box 15, 1473.

⁷ James Busby to Viscount Goderich, 6 January 1832, *HRA* s1 v11: 508.

⁸ Francis Forbes, Alexander McLeay, John Jamison, William Macarthur, Thomas Shepherd, 'Report on the Vines, Introduced into the Colony of New South Wales, in the Year 1832, by James Busby, Esq., With a Catalogue of the Several Varieties Growing in the Botanical Garden, in Sydney, in February 1834', Macarthur Papers, ML A4298.

⁹ George Suttor to Joseph Banks, 16 May 1799, ML A79-3: 237; George Suttor to Joseph Banks, 25 August 1799, ML A79-3: 242; Letter from George Suttor (to unnamed correspondent), 8 November 1799, ML A79-3: 244.

¹⁰ George Suttor to Joseph Banks, 10 December 1800, ML A79-3: 272.

¹¹ Mitchell's gardener purchased for his employer more than seven thousand cuttings of several varieties from Macarthur in 1844, see William Macarthur to Thomas Mitchell, 26 July 1844, Macarthur Papers, ML A2933: 70. Cuttings were also purchased from James King at Raymond Terrace; James King to Thomas Mitchell, Sir Thomas Livingstone Mitchell Papers, 31 July 1848, ML A293. Macarthur mentioned the vinedresser in a letter to another colonist, on the vinedressers' behalf as he was seeking further employment after working with Mitchell for 'a year or two', William Macarthur to 'Mr Lawson', 7 August 1846, ML A2933: 98.

¹² Journal of Sir Thomas Mitchell, ML A295-2: 179–180.

¹³ Conversation with Don Seton-Wilkinson, 3 March 2011.

¹⁴ Quotes are from *The Argus* (Melbourne), 10 March 1897.

¹⁵ *The Australian*, 30 April 1842.

¹⁶ *The [Melbourne] Argus*, 19 June 1875.

¹⁷ *The [Adelaide] Advertiser*, 20 November 1908; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 November 1908; *The Brisbane Courier*, 20 November 1908.

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