



Behind the
Top Drops

Tonon Vineyard & Winery Sangiovese

The Dr Rod Bonfiglioli Award for Best Wine of Show at the most recent Alternative Varieties Wine Show was awarded to Tonon Vineyard & Winery, situated in Western Australia's Perth Hills, for its 2022 Sangiovese. Released to market this month, **Sonya Logan** asked winemaker Daniel Tonon to share the backstory on this single-vineyard wine.

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of the Sangiovese, briefly tell us the Tonon story:

Tonon Vineyard & Winery was established in 2012. In the previous year, my wife, Daniela, and I purchased a five-acre property in Carmel, in the Perth Hills, and settled into our new home, together with our two young sons, with lots of ideas on how to turn an empty paddock into a new agricultural pursuit. At the time, I had recently completed

postgraduate studies in oenology at Curtin University. I felt it was time for a career change and to take a long-time hobby and passion for winemaking to the next level.

With lots of help from my father, Andrew, we planted small parcels of select grape varieties that I felt would best suit the hilly Mediterranean terroir of the Perth Hills. In particular, I focussed on alternative and emerging varieties that were new to

the Perth Hills, including one of my all-time favourites, Sangiovese.

After establishing the vineyard, the next stage was to construct a small winery to process the estate-grown fruit. It's a tight fit, but all aspects of the winemaking process are completed on site, including fermentation, filtration, bottling and labelling, as well as tirage, riddling and disgorging for our sparkling wine range. Since 2017, the same building has also



An aerial view of the Tonon vineyard, located in the Bickley Valley of Western Australia's Perth Hills region. The Sangiovese vines are in the centre of the photo.



served as our 'rustic' cellar door for tastings, sales and events, including art exhibitions.

We recently acquired an adjoining five-acre property, allowing for some expansion of the vineyard. It's an exciting blank canvas... so watch this space!

Our vineyard is 22km, as the crow flies, from the Perth CBD, which means we are effectively growing alternative grape varieties and crafting artisan wines within metropolitan Perth.

Now for the nitty-gritty! When was the first Tonon Sangiovese produced?

Starting this journey from scratch, I didn't have particular expectations or premeditated ideas — I just wanted to make wines that would link varietal characteristics, particularly of the less known varieties, with the terroir of the vineyard. However, as each variety has developed, the wines' styles have evolved.

The first crop of Sangiovese was harvested from very young vines in 2014, and from the very beginning, the wine stood out as being amazingly savoury and structured, despite the youth of both the vines and the wine. Dark berries, cherries and Mediterranean herbs, great structural, mouth-watering acidity and fine tannins have continued to be the hallmarks

of the Tonon Sangiovese ever since, culminating in the 2022 vintage in which these characteristics have come together to provide exceptional balance, even at this young age.

What percentage of your annual production is dedicated to Sangiovese?

By volume and yield, Sangiovese is my biggest red wine/variety and constitutes almost 20% of my annual wine production. For the first four or five years, I harvested a portion of the Sangiovese a little earlier to make a pale, dry rosé, which also displayed great structure and savouriness. These days, all the fruit contributes towards the Tonon Sangiovese.

Tonon Sangiovese is a single-vineyard wine. Tell us about that vineyard:

The vineyard, winery and cellar door all sit on our five-acre property, overlooked by our family home. Carmel is situated in the Bickley Valley, an area that has been dominated by orchards over the past 100 years or so. More recently, small family vine growing and winemaking operations have developed into the Bickley Valley Wine trail as part of the Perth Hills Geographical Indication.

Our first plantings were Sangiovese, Fiano, Vermentino and Tempranillo, and two clones of Cabernet Sauvignon to embrace a well-loved classic variety in a Perth Hills setting. Over the next couple of years we added Malbec, Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay into our vineyard and began planting cuttings of Prosecco/Glera that we had imported into WA through the then Department of Agriculture and Food, now the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

At 300m above sea level, our vineyard has a western aspect, facing the Indian



Dan Tonon

Ocean, but protected by a ridge of the Darling Scarp. The vines, planted east to west to ensure even exposure to the sun, are cooled late in the day by the sea breeze. Gravelly loam soils over clay and granite allow for great drainage, especially during the wet, cool winters.

I hand prune all vines to a mixture of cane and spur pruning and hand tend all vines throughout the growing season, including summer hedging, shoot thinning and netting, to protect fruit from the significant bird pressure.

Given the vicinity to the city, I have had to make best use of the space, so rows are tight at 2.1m and planting density is 3174 vines per hectare. The spray regime is copper and sulfur across all varieties and mid rows are mowed to the side to mulch the undervine area.

Do the same Sangiovese vines usually provide the fruit for the wine or can that change from year to year based on the vintage?

Each year the Sangiovese is produced from the entire yield of the existing, estate-grown Sangiovese vines.



Daniel Tonon with freshly-harvested Sangiovese grapes.

With experience, I've learned to harness the seasonal influence on the Sangiovese vines and the fruit they produce, and carry that through in my winemaking.

Daniel Tonon

Tell us about those vines:

Two clones of Sangiovese — 'H6V9' and a clone referred to as 'Brunello di Montalcino' — are planted on their own roots, almost equally in the rear half of our vineyard. The soil is more gravelly at this point and although they don't require much in the way of irrigation, we do have drip irrigation available if needed. I spur prune the Sangiovese vines to bilateral cordons and have trained them to a VSP trellis with moveable foliage wires.

All fruit is gently hand-harvested and transported about 50 metres to the winery for processing.

What is the average yield from the vines?

The average yield from the Sangiovese vines is 2 to 2.5 tonnes annually.

Describe the current winemaking process that brings the wine to fruition:

We harvest each clone separately to ensure ideal ripeness, as they do differ, but never in any particular order. Grapes are crushed to open fermenters and inoculated with a range of yeast cultures, often multiple. Ferments are hand plunged three times daily and wines tested and tasted daily to assess flavour and tannin development. We press the wines to stainless steel tanks and allow malolactic fermentation to occur prior to racking to a range of French oak barriques, of which 20-30% are new.

The wine spends a minimum of 12 months in oak, after which it is lightly filtered and bottled on site, then allowed a further two years in bottle prior to release.

Any immediate plans to change how the wine is made?

No, at this stage there are no specific plans to change the methods of production of the Sangiovese. However, I'm really interested in exploring alternatives in wine maturation, such as different oak sources, barrel sizes and even the option of alternative vessels, such as terracotta or concrete.

One area in which I am changing the process slightly is bottle age. The 2022 vintage is bright and pronounced and has an appealing spice and lightness that suggests it will drink very well young, but also has reserves of fruit and freshness to give it great cellaring potential. On this basis, we are preparing to release it earlier than we have in the past (nine months in bottle), celebrating its youth and offering it in parallel with more mature vintages of the same wine.

Is the wine made every year?

Absolutely! This wine is a personal favourite, and one that changes with every new vintage. I can't wait to do a full spectrum vertical tasting.

It's a privilege to shine a spotlight on Sangiovese, from the vine to the glass. It's a wine I love to grow, love to make and love to enjoy with my family and friends.

Biggest challenge in making this wine?

Of all the varieties that I produce, the Sangiovese is the most influenced by the season. Budburst is early and harvest is late, the result being that the vine carries its fruit for longer and is exposed to both extremities of the season. In the beginning, I tried to create wines that were more consistent to what I thought was the vines' standard. With experience, I've learned to harness the seasonal influence on the Sangiovese vines and the fruit they produce, and carry that through in my winemaking. I am happy to say that I now celebrate the differences and influences that each vintage brings.

What's the recommended retail price of the wine, approximately how much is produced each year, and where is it sold?

Depending upon the season, approximately 100 to 150 dozen bottles are produced annually and each bottle is numbered. Following our recent success at the 2023

Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show, and given the demand for this new wine, I am pleased to advise that the 2022 Sangiovese will be released in March 2024 and will be available exclusively from the cellar door, or through online sales. The recommended retail price is \$55.

I've just turned up at your cellar door and have asked about your Sangiovese. Give me your sales pitch that explains what to expect when I taste it:

The Sangiovese is our go-to food wine, savoury and mouth-watering, with cherries and spice on the nose. Subtle, supporting oak hovers in the background but never overpowers the fruit. Sangiovese is the perfect wine for pairing with the char-grill, with pizza, pasta and anything typically Italian. In the case of the 2022 vintage, expand this to include baked whole fish or salmon on the barbeque.

Best vintages?

Our Sangiovese vines are only just turning 12, so I have very high hopes for them as they develop into maturity. But I would be lying if I didn't say 2022 is an absolute highlight. **CW**



A pump for every step of the wine making process

Global Pumps

1300 1 GLOBAL
sales@globalpumps.com.au
globalpumps.com.au