

On capitalizing in Variety names

Or – Pinot noir... little 'n' or big 'N'?

by Jason Lett

We use the very old-school French capitalization regimen, which capitalizes the first word but not the second, if the second word is an adjective. However, second words that are proper names (Meunier, Ottonel) get capitalized.

As a reference we use Victor Pulliat's seminal 1888 reference *Mille Varietes de Vigne*, which my father copied out by hand from the Davis library and was the intellectual basis of his decision to plant Pinot noir in Oregon's Period 1 climate.

These days it can be found in Google and I think might be the best thing on the internet, bar none.

So for example Pinot noir, the noir isn't capitalized because it's a color (black.) But in Pinot Meunier it is capitalized because Meunier is a proper name (Miller).

Here's another example from Pulliat:

Muscat noir commun. Voir *Caillaba*.

Muscat noir du Jura. Voir *Caillaba*.

Muscat Ottonel. [D^r H. Semis de Moreau-Robert, 1852.] BOURGEONNEMENT peu duveteux, teinté de rose sur le revers et le sommet des folioles. FEUILLE petite, glabre et à peu près lisse super., légèrement garnie infer., sur les nervures, d'un duvet pileux; sinus bien marqués, celui du pétiole fermé; denture assez large, un peu obtuse. GRAPPE petite, cylindro-conique, un peu serrée, sur un pédoncule assez fort et un peu long. GRAIN sous-moyen, à peu près globuleux, sur des pédicelles courts et assez forts; chair un peu molle, bien sucrée, agréablement relevée d'une fine saveur musquée; peau fine, peu résistante, d'un beau jaune doré à la MATURITÉ de 1^{re} époque.



Traditionally the French never used varietal names on their labels; however for low-end cuvées I'm seeing varietal labeling more and more in French wines, and often Pinot Noir is capitalized on both words. Just another example of how colonials like us can be more French than the French. At Eyrie we freely admit to being oddballs so I'd say capitalize any way you want to!