

THE “HOUGHTON” CLONE STORY

The Western Australian Cabernet industry was originally founded on the Houghton clone selections, with many of Margaret River's greatest Cabernet being made from Houghton clone, which has a unique Western Australian heritage.

The original Cabernet Sauvignon vines that became the Houghton clones were introduced to Western Australia between 1836 and 1895, most likely from South Africa.

Cabernet Sauvignon remained an insignificant variety in Western Australia until the 1930's. Plantings were limited because of the low bearing nature of the variety.

In the 1930s the Houghton Vineyard took cuttings from old bush vines in Middle Swan to establish a 1.6-hectare planting known as the 'Houghton Cabernet block'. Although the vigour, yield and wine making qualities varied across the Houghton Cabernet block, legendary Houghton winemaker Jack Mann was firmly of the view that grapes from the block could be used to make outstanding wines. This 5-acre plot eventually becomes the source block for the first Cabernet Sauvignon planted in the Margaret River region in 1967.

However, from 1976 to the late 1990s, the Houghton Clones became neglected as imported clones, primarily South Australian selection SA126, became favoured.

While SA126 can produce wonderful aromatic Cabernet, it is generally considered to be higher yielding and tends to be lighter in weight, sometimes showing more leafy, herbaceous characters unless fully ripe.

In the late 1990s at the request of the Western Australian wine industry, the department reestablished research into the viticultural and wine quality traits of several of the Houghton clones. As a result of favourable comparisons with imported clones in blind sensory tastings, the industry has once again become interested in the Houghton clones for future plantings and re-plantings.

Source: Much of the Historical information was taken from "Cabernet Sauvignon in Western Australia" Compiled by Glynn Ward and Ian Cameron, Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia.



Houghton Clone Characteristics

Houghton clone Cabernet often displays lower vigour vines, lower yields and smaller berries.

It produces wines with ripe skin and seed tannins, medium to full weight and great intensity.

It generally displays less herbaceous characters and a lovely density with classic, blackcurrant and cassis characters and certainly demonstrates that 'power and elegance' are not necessarily mutually exclusive.