



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Alex's Newsletter #2 March 2007

**Domaine Chandon Z.D.
Blanc de Blancs 2003**

The region: Yarra Valley (Victoria)

The alcohol: 12.5%

The taste: Dry as, crisp, citrus

The price: \$38 or 10% off in a dozen



More detail:

This wine shows that Australian sparkling wines can be as good as French champers.

The ZD in the name means “zero dosage”. Dosage refers to a sweet liqueur that is added during the sparkling winemaking process. It tends to cover up some faults in the wine, as well as helping fermentation. The winemakers decided that the wine was so perfect, there was no need to cover up any faults and continued without the dosage, leaving a wine that is very dry and just lovely to drink.

Champagne and most Australian sparkling whites are made from a blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier. That's right, two of the grapes that go into it are red grapes. Blanc de blancs in the title means that this sparkling is made entirely from white (blanc) grapes, in this case chardonnay. This results in a very clean, crisp wine without the gamey characteristics that pinot noir can bring to the mix.

The other thing to note about this wine is that it's under a crown seal, same as a beer. Some customers have told me this looks a little bit cheap. I can see their point, but when you realise that this is the sparkling equivalent of a screw cap enclosure then you realise that the sparkling wine reaches you in the same condition that it left the winery, just as the winemaker intended.

Redbank Sunday Morning Pinot Gris 2006

The region: King Valley (North Vic)

The alcohol: 14.5%

The taste: Aromatic, peaches, lychees

The price: \$20 or 10% off in a dozen



Pinot gris and pinot grigio. What's the deal?

Well actually, they're the same grape. Gris and grigio are the French and Italian words for grey. Pinot noir is pinot black (red) and pinot blanc is pinot white, referring to the colour of the skin of the grape. They're all related.

In pinot grigio, the grapes are picked earlier so they are less ripe. This means there is less sugar to convert to alcohol, generally resulting in dryer wines.

In pinot gris, the grapes are picked later. They are more ripe, which means more sugar and higher alcohol. Sometimes there can be residual sugar after the fermentation, making a somewhat sweet wine, but not always.

However, just because it says one or the other on the label, doesn't mean the wine is necessarily made in that way.

More detail:

The Redbank label was originally made by Neill Robb. He sold the label to Yalumba and now concentrates on his Sally's Hill and Sally's Paddock labels.

This wine is now made by Natalie Fryar and has been made by her for the last few vintages. Under her guidance, this pinot gris has flourished and become one of the most sought after whites in this shop. In fact, we believe we're the biggest seller of this wine in NSW.

For those who haven't tried pinot gris before, it's not as fruity as sauvignon blanc. You don't get the passionfruit or pineapple smack to the face that sauvignon blanc usually brings. Instead, the wine is more elegant and subtle. It doesn't tend to jump out of the glass at you, it almost hides in the glass. We refer to these styles as “aromatic”.

The advantage of this less fruity taste is that it can go with just about anything that you want to serve. I drink it with seafood, particularly prawns and scallops. However the real beauty is that you can drink it with spicy food. Next time you have Thai or Indian, give it a go and you'll see what I mean. It's the perfect wine to pick up and take across the road to Thai Riffic.

This wine is becoming quite limited, so be sure to try it as soon as possible and if you like it, grab a case. Thank me later.

There will not be a 2007 due to bushfires in the vineyard, so make sure you get some to tide you through.

Chalice Bridge Chardonnay 2005

The region: Margaret River (WA)
The alcohol: 13.5%
The taste: Honey, peaches, vanilla
The price: \$20 or 10% off in a dozen



This is the old label, but you get the idea. The website, www.chalicebridge.com.au has pictures of all of their wines with a glass next to it containing the characters of the wine, eg peach. It's a brilliant idea and is certainly worth checking out, particularly if you are trying to learn what wines made from different grapes tend to taste like.

While you're at the website, be sure to read about the dragon on the label, called Ouroborus. The name is Greek and means "devouring its tail". The Ouroborus Dragon can be found in Chinese engravings back to 1200BC, as well as brief cameos in Egyptian, Phoenician, Norse and Hindu mythology.

I don't think I'll be able to remember that name, so I'll just call him Fred.

More detail:

Chalice Bridge is a relatively new face in Margaret River, only in their sixth vintage. They've already shown that they can make brilliant wines, with 3 trophies, 6 golds and 25 silvers to date.

Since 2005, Bob Cartwright has been their consultant winemaker. This is a pretty big thing, since Bob used to be the winemaker at Leeuwin Estate. For those of you who don't know, Leeuwin Estate Chardonnay is generally considered the best in Australia and retails for around \$95. So he kinda knows what he's doing.

This chardonnay is in the range of wines they refer to as their "Vineyard Champions" and it's not hard to see why. Amazing golden colour. Honey, melons and nectarines on the nose. The palate is elegant and refined, rather than being a fruit bomb. You can taste the oak but it's delicate... you won't get splinters. Instead, look for a nice creaminess and hints of figs, citrus and vanilla from the oak.

You can age it if you want and it will develop more honeyed characters, but it's designed to drink young. It'll go well with creamy or buttery dishes or just gulp it down after a typical Monday at work. At this price, it really is something you can drink more often than not.

We also carry their shiraz, their shiraz cabernet and their cabernet merlot. It's worth watching this label in the future.

Austin's Pinot Noir 2005

The region: Geelong (Victoria)
The alcohol: 14.0%
The taste: Warm cherries and vanilla
The price: \$24 or 10% off in a dozen



Alcohol levels in wine

A lot of wine commentators have noted the tendency towards high alcohol wines in Australia. High alcohol generally refers to wines of about 13.0% or above. The level of alcohol is directly related to the sugar levels in the grapes when they are picked. The more ripe they are, the higher the sugar levels. Some grapes are naturally high in sugar, resulting in high alcohol (eg grenache).

So, apart from getting the consumer smashed, what is the result of different alcohol levels for the consumer? And how can judges tell that a wine is high in alcohol without seeing the label? Well, high alcohol wines have a warming effect on your mouth and throat, even if they are served chilled in the case of whites.

More detail:

Austin's is known as a pinot noir specialist, even though they also make riesling, chardonnay and shiraz. They also make an entry level label called sixfootsix, which we sell for \$17. When we sampled them a few years ago (it's a tough job), we recognised the quality of the product and bought them in. The result? Our customers have embraced both the Austin's and sixfootsix labels.

The 2004 Austin's pinot won numerous accolades, including the trophy for best pinot at the 2005 Geelong Wine Show. The 2005 Austin's pinot has continued this success with the Jean Hameury Trophy for Best Pinot Noir in Show at the 16th Le Concours des Vins du Victoria 2006. With a big, long, French-sounding name like that, you know it's a good one to win.

So it seems our customers have great taste!

This wine shows that pinot noir is not necessarily a watery red wine. It has a big nose, reminding me of cherries with hints of game. It tastes ripe, full-bodied and rich, but not sweet and not too over the top. You pick up those cherries that you smelt, as well as some other red berry flavours, but also hints of oak. The use of oak in this wine is quite classy, just the right exposure to give it an extra level of complexity without drowning out the natural fruit tastes from the grapes.