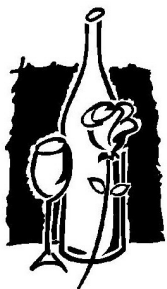


Alex's Newsletter

#15

April 2008



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Torrent Bay Pinot Gris 2007

The region: Nelson (NZ)

The alcohol: 13.0%

The taste: Strong white peaches

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



We had a sample bottle of this wine sitting in the fridge waiting for us for a few months but couldn't find the time in the busy lead up to Christmas. When we got around to trying it, we put it up against six other pinot gris and grigios and this was the stand out.

From the Nelson region of New Zealand, which is just next to Marlborough, Torrent Bay is the top label from the people at Anchorage wines. Nelson has a northerly aspect which results in the highest sunshine hours in NZ. More sunshine = riper fruit = fuller flavoured wines.

And that's exactly why it stood out against the other whites we tasted. A lot of them were watery little numbers, nothing too special at all. In fact, we could have sworn that one of them was half wine half water. But this one jumped out of the glass and made itself known.

Now this isn't a style that will suit absolutely everyone. The fuller flavours might be a bit much for some people who like a more aromatic, lighter style of white. And normally we recommend pinot gris with spicy food or seafood, but this one might be a bit too much for that seafood dinner you had planned or those lighter, vegie-based Thai dishes.

But the peach and pear aromas will go so well with some bigger dishes and this is why it's important to select your wine carefully to go with food. So try it with that slightly spicy, marinated beef salad that you've been dreaming of cooking or with that prawn stir fry with lots of sauce. Or drink it by itself and you may not need lunch at all.

Chablis

The town and surrounding commune of Chablis lies in the valley of the river Serein. It's north of Burgundy and south of Champagne, pretty much bang in the middle between them.

History and Climate

The region has seen a pretty tough history. The area may have had vines there as far back as the Romans, but in 1568, the town was demolished by the Huguenots. Just when it was starting to recover in the 18th century, the Revolution and Prussian invasions smashed the town again. In 1880, when the vines were starting to recover, the region was hit with mildew (very bad for grapes) and the dreaded phylloxera (which I'll write about in a future newsletter). World War II also had a pretty decent bulldozer effect on the region and terrible frosts in 1957 and 1961 wiped out even more. Many vineyards are yet to be replanted after this. In fact, that might never happen.

The climate is pretty hot in summer, but during winter it's pretty cold and the winter tends to last for quite awhile, since there is no weather influence from the sea. There isn't really a region like that in Oz, so we can't really produce wines in the chablis style.

Like the Burgundy and Champagne regions, the main white grape here is Chardonnay. In fact, that's just about the only grape planted here.

The wines are remarkable for their pure aroma and taste which is steely and dry. They can age if you want.

Appellations in Chablis

There are four "ranks" in the Chablis appellation system, in descending order: Chablis Grand Cru, Chablis Premier Cru, Chablis and Petit Chablis.

The grand cru vineyards are recognised as the best grapes in the region and all come from one area on the right bank of the river. There are seven grand cru vineyards. These wines are expensive for whites, but aren't as pricey as some of the most famous French wines.

The premier cru vineyards are the next rank down. On both sides of the river, but the best are just next to the grand crus. There used to be more Chablis premier cru than standard Chablis, but this has changed now.

Chablis is now the main appellation in the region – most wines from the region have this appellation on the label.

Petit Chablis is the lowest rank, but the wines can still be quite drinkable.

The use of oak

This is quite controversial in Chablis. In every other decent French region, chardonnay and oak are usually automatically married together. In Chablis this is happening less and less, because winemakers are looking more for the pure flavours from the grape and oak can mask these subtle flavours. Those who do use oak tend to use it sparingly because the flavours aren't very strong, but when the oak is used properly, it can add an extra dimension to the wine.

William Fevre

The region: Chablis (France)



Bill Fevre is probably the most important producer in Chablis. Located amongst the grand cru vineyards (see article), they're often seen as the godfather of Chablis.

We carry two of the wines from the domaine. We always have the Petit Chablis, but we mix up the premier cru that we carry from time to time just for a bit of variety. We currently have the Vaillons in stock.

Premier Cru – Vaillons (\$70)

From some of the best vineyards in the region, this wine shows mineral flavours, typical of Vaillons. Look for the structure of this wine, that's what it's all about. See how the acid, fruit flavours and just a hint of oak mesh together in harmony. That's the sign of a great wine and that's what justifies the price here.

If you're looking at eating shellfish in the near future, buy a bottle of this. It's a match made in heaven.

Petit Chablis (\$30)

Good value for French wine, but how does it compare to Aussie whites?

Well, it's hard to compare them. Chablis is a style we can't really do here in Oz because we don't have the right climate. It's lighter in style than our chardonnay, much more delicate. You almost have to put out a search party to find the flavour, particularly if you serve it too cold (something that happens just a bit too much). However, when you know what to look for, this wine is great value. Give it a bit of age if you like and it will develop some honeyed flavours too. But for now, it's all about the freshness.

Teusner Wines

The region: Barossa (SA)

Winemaker: Kym Teusner (he also makes the wines at Rolf Binder)



Teusner Riebke shiraz (left) and Joshua grenache/mataro/shiraz

I've been trying to find the distributor of these wines for quite awhile. When one of our sales reps changed company and came in with his new portfolio, this was the first thing I saw. Next thing you know, the boys had tasted the wines and we now have two of Kym's wines in the shop.

Kym is one of the new generations of winemakers that is making exciting Barossa wine. He mostly concentrates on shiraz and grenache.

“The Riebke” Shiraz 2006 (\$20)

Named after the Riebke brothers who grow some of the best shiraz in the Ebenezer district. They helped Kym when he started up, so this is his tribute to them.

It's young and huge, but you'd expect that in a Barossa shiraz with 14.5% alcohol. It needs to go with a full flavoured dish (eg T-bone!) or it will overpower your meal. It will reward a good 5 years in the cellar and at this price you can afford to buy a case to put away for awhile.

Joshua Grenache/Mataro/Shz (\$32)

Last month I wrote about the Rhone valley and their grenache based wines. How do they compare to Australian stuff? Well, this is a great wine to compare against the French. In fact, it really shows the difference in style between the full-bodied, juicy, rich style of the Barossa against the more subtle, lighter but elegant Rhone valley. Both are great in their own way and the two styles often polarise people. Some don't like the intense, over-the-top Barossa style. But we do and we're willing to bet you will too. Why? Coz we're not French!

Monthly Tastings

Don't forget our monthly tastings, held on the first Tuesday evening of every month.

We kick off at 6.30pm and go for an hour. It's best to be on time so you can keep up with everyone else.

Bookings are essential as our cellar only has limited space.

Special prices on all of the wines in the tasting are available for those who come along. Check out the tastings page on the website for more info.

Our Website!

www.rosebaydriveinliquorstore.com.au

If you or a friend wish to join the mailing list for this newsletter, just let me know by e-mail at sales@rosebayliquor.com.au

Past newsletters are available on the website, feel free to have a look around. If you have any questions, feel free to send them through.

Don't forget our monthly tastings, first Tuesday of every month, starting at 6.30pm sharp.