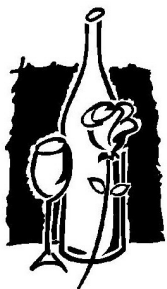


Alex's Newsletter

#16

May 2008



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Pondalowie 2005 Shiraz Viognier

The region: Bendigo (VIC)

The alcohol: 14.5%

The taste: Brooding, spicy blackberry

The price: \$28 or 10% off in a dozen



Dominic and Krystina Morris met while working vintage in the Barossa and hooked up. Then they decided to make their own stuff. With that Barossa background, it's not that surprising that they've set about making some of Australia's best reds. It's always amazing when you can say that about a winery that's only been around for about 10 years. Only, they did it in Victoria instead of South Australia, just to be a bit different.

They're famous for their straight shiraz and shiraz/viognier blend, but are also doing some interesting things with the tempranillo grape, which is growing in popularity in Australia.

They have a real eye for detail and have been involved in every step of setting up the winery. This has paid off. They have regularly received 5 star ratings from James Halliday and great reviews from everyone who writes about Australian wine.

The 2005 shiraz viognier received 94 points from Halliday, noting that it will age for 10 years, plus many other glowing reviews. I'll add my glowing review to that list.

Look for spicy blackberry and mulberry flavours, with a hint of lifted floral notes from the 5% viognier. It's drinking well now, but buy a case and hide some away for that roast pork in a few years.

Many comment on the label. I think it's a little weird to look at, some might say ugly. Contrary to popular belief, it's not a barbed wire fence, but a stylistic representation of their dog. Apparently the dog doesn't get fed very often.

Champagne

The region

Ah Champagne, the region with a billion stories – most of which tend to be untrue.

The Champagne region is an area in the north east of France, where you will find chardonnay and pinot noir everywhere. It's picturesque and it's about as far north as the wine world dares to venture. The average temperature in the region is 10 degrees Celsius, so it's just not that nice to be out there in winter pruning the vines.

The wines

We've all heard of Champagne, but what exactly are we talking about here? Wines made in Champagne are sparkling wines produced by a secondary fermentation that takes place once the wine is in the bottle. This creates carbon dioxide and bubbles... and giggling teenage girls.

Champagne can only be made from chardonnay, pinot noir and/or pinot meunier. The latter two are red grapes, but the juice is removed from contact with the grape skins before fermentation, resulting in white wine. Rosé Champagne is produced by leaving some juice in contact with the skins. Chardonnay adds acid and structure, pinot noir adds "meatiness" and pinot meunier adds richness.

If a Champagne is produced only using chardonnay, it is called a blanc de blancs (white of whites). If there is no chardonnay, it is a blanc de noir (white wine made from black grapes).

Dom Perignon

Rumour has it that a monk called Dom Perignon invented Champagne. This isn't true. There are records of sparkling wine being produced in Champagne for a few decades before the Dom was born. But he did introduce rigorous practices to stop a common problem of the day – exploding bottles. In a Champagne bottle, the wines are under a lot of pressure and once one went, it was like a chain reaction. These days the bottles are thicker. The Dom also tasted grapes from different vineyards without knowing which vineyard they were from, a process known as "blind tasting". Many thought this meant he was blind, which he wasn't.

Legend has it that he yelled "Come quickly, I'm drinking the stars!" when he invented sparkling wine. Unfortunately he didn't, but why let the truth get in the way of a good yarn?

Disgorging

The secondary fermentation of Champagne happens in the bottle with crown seals (beer caps) on the top. Now, I could talk about riddling, gyropalettes and all that kinda stuff, but at the end of the day, the yeast is removed from the bottle and a cork is shoved in the end with a cage to stop it flying out. This is disgorgement.

Storage

Once a bottle has been disgorged, you need to get into it fairly quickly. Wine is fragile and the pressure on it doesn't do it any favours. So, if you've had a bottle sitting around for more than say 2 years, there's no time like the present to get into it.

Louis Roederer

The region: Champagne (France)



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Our next tasting on Tuesday June 3rd at 6.30pm.

Roederer is one of the largest Champagne houses that is still independently owned. Founded in 1776, it's just south of Reims, a subregion of Champagne. Tsar Nicholas II named it the official wine supplier to the Imperial Court of Russia. Since then it has been known as the "Champagne of the Tsars". Clearly Nick had taste.

Unfortunately, so does the rest of the world and it's getting harder and harder to get your hands on this stuff. In fact, the Champagne region is expanding to keep up with demand. Prices are rising too, just to make things more difficult for everyone!

Non Vintage Brut (\$84.99)

Mostly made from pinot noir (70%) with some chardonnay (30%). This is one of the best non-vintage Champers on the market. It's certainly my favourite and many of the staff in the shop agree with me. Forget Moet, forget Veuve. Treat yourself on your next big occasion with this stuff and you'll never look back.

Shame the label is a bit, well, dated. But you don't drink the label, do you? Coz if you do, there are places for people like you.

Cristal (\$350)

In contrast, the premiere cuvee (best blend) called Cristal is made from about 50% chardy and 50% pinot noir, with just a touch of meunier in there.

American rappers seem to drink this as much as possible, because it's a status symbol, as do the new rich in countries like China, India and Russia. Very hard to get, but worth it.

Primo Estate

The region: McLaren Vale (SA)

The winemaker: Joe and Dina Grilli

Joe Grilli learned how to make wine at Roseworthy school, which is affiliated with the University of Adelaide. It's the most well-known and prestigious winemaking course in Australia. In fact, he was dux of the course. Seems like he knows what he's doing then.



Primo Estate has been around since the 70's. The new winery is located in McLaren Vale, across the road from Wirra Wirra. The Primo Estate range (reviewed here) is the entry level stuff and they're doing pretty well with it. The premium "Joseph" wines are absolutely amazing but at about \$60 per bottle on average, so they bloody should be!

Primo Estate "La Biondina" Colombard/Sauvignon Blanc (\$18)

So you're a sauvignon blanc drinker, but you're getting bored with them because they all taste the same, right? Well, why not try this one? It's great value and tastes fantastic too. At our first tasting, it was the one that sold the most afterwards, so that's always a good sign.

The sauv blanc adds a bit of grassy, herbaceous flavour while the colombard (a grape that not many in Oz know) adds structure and even just a little bit of chalkiness. La Biondina means little blonde, which is somehow appropriate for this wine.

Primo Estate "Il Briccone" Sangiovese/Shiraz (\$23)

There is also a red blend under the Primo label that is making waves in the winemaking world. It sells out quickly each year – even Joe's fellow winemakers in South Australia can't get their hands on any once he has released it.

Spicy shiraz mixed with dry, subtle sangiovese makes for an interesting blend that works really well. It drinks well now, but you could put a bit of this away for a few years and reap the rewards later.