

Alex's Newsletter

#17 June 2008



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

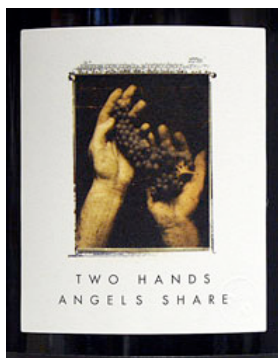
Two Hands 2006 "Angel's Share" Shiraz

The region: McLaren Vale (SA)

The alcohol: 14.5%

The taste: Bold, rich, spicy plums

The price: \$30 or 10% off in a dozen



I reviewed the Two Hands "Gnarly Dudes" Barossa shiraz in the February newsletter (it's on our website). This time, it's the "Angel's Share". It's also a shiraz - they are shiraz specialists - but this is from McLaren Vale.

Both regions are known for shirazes that are high in alcohol and are full-bodied and full-flavoured. However, McLaren is known for silky wines. This is due to the tannin structure.

Ever tasted a bottle of red that's been cellared for awhile? Sometimes there's a build up of sediment on the side of the bottle if it has been lying down, or you can get pieces of a sandy, gritty substance in the bottom of the bottle. This is tannin. You also find it in tea.

The tannin in a red wine is what gives it structure and allows it to age. Grapes with thicker skins (shiraz and cabernet for example) produce wines with more tannin, whereas grapes like pinot noir with their thin skins produce much less tannic wines. White wines don't have tannin because there is no skin contact during fermentation. McLaren Vale is known for its silky smooth tannins.

So with this wine, you get a full-bodied, full-flavoured red wine that just slides down your throat because it's so smooth. In fact, you need to be careful how much you drink of it, it goes down that easy. Imagine drinking liquid velvet and you've got the right idea. Just the thing to keep you warm this winter.

The Angel's Share refers to medieval winemakers who thought that angels watched over the wine fermenting in their barrels. Some disappeared due to evaporation, but they thought it was the angels taking their share.

Bordeaux (cont.)

Wineries and classifications

So, which wineries are the interesting/expensive/snobby ones? Well, all are snobby... they're French, what do you expect?

The French decided that they needed to classify which wineries were the best to help, well, prices more than anything. So they made a list. In fact, over the years, they've made a few lists. The first, in 1855, I've mentioned briefly in a previous newsletter. This covered red wines from Médoc (with one exception) and sweet wines from Sauternes. They arranged the wines into tiers and called them "crus" (growth place) to reflect their place of origin. So the premier crus, the first growths, were the best wines. In the reds, these were Lafite Rothschild, Margaux, Latour, Mouton Rothschild and Haut-Brion (the exception, from Pessac in the Graves region). In the whites, Château d'Yquem ("dee-kemm") was in the top tier - in fact, it even got its own level and was called a superior first growth. Napoleon III came up with the idea of making this list.

The other regions felt a bit left out but it took them awhile to do anything about it. In 1955, the St-Émilion region came out with its own list consisting of three categories with two wineries in the top level, Château Ausone and Château Cheval Blanc. This one gets reclassified every 10 years or so.

Do the classifications mean anything? Well, they did. Are these still the best wineries? Sometimes, but not all the time. It's of interest for historical reasons more than anything. However, these wineries do command

ridiculously high prices. For example, we have a bottle of Lafite Rothschild in the cellar for \$1400. We accept cash, credit cards and first born children.

Great vintages

There have been a lot of great vintages in Bordeaux. Often, the subregions are rated separately though, so it's important to do your research before lashing out.

2000 and 1990 were the best vintages generally throughout Bordeaux in recent memory. But the 2005 knocked them off the chart, particularly wines produced in St-Émilion. In general, avoid 91, 92 and 93 and 1980 wasn't too crash hot either.

Of course, just because it was a great vintage doesn't mean that every wine produced in that year was great. It's best to check a few reviews about a wine before you purchase it. Reviews are easy to find online. Find a critic who likes the wines that you like and follow their advice. Or buy me a bottle and I'll tell you about it.

Bordeaux bottles

Last thing to mention is the shape of the bottles. We all know that bottles from Champagne have a certain look and are made from heavy glass to withstand the pressure of the bubbles. But Bordeaux and Burgundy have their own bottle shapes.

Bordeaux bottles are the fat ones at the bottom that taper towards the neck. Bordeaux are the skinny ones with shoulders. The shoulders help catch the sediment formed by the tannin as you pour the wine into a decanter, lit solely by candlelight to see when the grains start to pour. It's all very romantic, isn't it?

Bordeaux

The region

Bordeaux is a port city in the southwest of France. The port is important as it helped the wine spread around the world, particularly to the US when it was just a baby, which helped it become famous.

Wine in Bordeaux dates back 2000 years to Roman times. The word Bordeaux comes from the French "au bord de l'eau" - on the edge of the water. This is the Gironde Estuary, which is an important factor in the history and success of the region. The vines were originally planted for the Roman soldiers. When Rome fell around 400AD, the region suffered large setbacks coz the French were too busy hiding to make wine. Since then, there have been a few more minor setbacks, including every vine dying, but it's flourishing these days.

The wines

Bordeaux produces red, white and a smidge of rose wines. The white wines are made from semillon and sauvignon blanc, just like we make. Bordeaux whites are a little different to the ones you find here. They are released once the acid dies down.

But most producers focus on red wine. Bordeaux reds are the stuff of legend, both for quality and their often astronomical price tags. They are not designed to be drunk young, most take a few decades before you want to go near them, and then even just to read the label. The reds are made from cabernet sauvignon and it's genetic cousins - merlot, malbec, petit verdot and cabernet franc. Another grape, carménère was used but not so much anymore.

Garagistes

Not everyone makes wines like that though. In the mid 90's a group called the Garagistes emerged, coz they literally made wine in their garages - at least, the first one, Château Valandraud did. "Hints of petrol fumes" I hear you say? Not quite. The reds they produce are bigger, bolder, more fruity and have a higher alcohol content. The whites have a bit more oak and sometimes a bit of residual sugar. This makes the wines much easier to drink at a younger age as that's what they thought the public wanted.

It's worked. Some of these wines now sell for much more than the traditional counterparts, due in no small part to glowing reviews from Robert Parker Jr (the world's most influential wine critic). Of course, the traditional winemakers turn their nose up at the Garagistes. And then cry. Probably.

Regions

The major argument by the tear-stained traditionalists is that the wines won't age well and don't reflect the *terroir* - the effects of the region/climate/Mother Nature on the taste of the wine. Bordeaux is famous for its subregions that each have their own unique *terroir* based on which bank of the estuary they're on, etc etc.

The regions are generally divided into the right bank (of the Dordogne river), the "entre-deux-mers" (between two seas, in the middle between the Dordogne and Garonne rivers) and the left bank (left of the Garonne). The latter is further subdivided into Graves and Medoc. In general, and this is very general, wineries on the left bank and closest to the sea, in the Medoc, Haut-Medoc and Saint-Estephe regions are the most expensive.

Maverick

The region: Eden Valley (SA)



The winemaker, Chris Taylor



The fermenting tanks

One of my finds in my trip through South Australia was Maverick Wines. It took me ages to convince the boys to get them in, but here they are. I'm still working on getting the riesling in too as it has had amazing reviews too.

Maverick was set up by a winemaker who used to work for Henschke. He got a rich investor on board who wanted him to have the best of everything and really splashed out. The winery is insulated, the barrels are expensive, there are a lot of small fermenters for small batch production (which helps increase complexity) and everything else is just exactly what you would want if you were creating your own winery. It's paid off, they're getting amazing reviews everywhere.

"Trial Hill" Chardonnay (\$35)

I loved this wine when I tried it. The sommelier at Tetsuya's agrees with me. It's on the wine list there (or it was last time I went through) and it deserves to be, it's such a good match with food. The oak is present but restrained, the fruit is fresh and lively and the taste is complex.

"Trial Hill" Shiraz (\$60)

But this was the pick of the bunch. It's inky to look at, so deep in colour. It's a big, powerful wine with structure and depth. Blackberries, dark plums, very intense. But don't just take my word for it.

Andrew Caillard MW - 93 pts
Robert Parker Jr - 91 pts
James Halliday - 96 pts
Huo Hooke - 94 pts

Yes, it's expensive, but why drink OK wine when there's so much amazing stuff out there?



Our Website

www.rosebaydriveinliquorstore.com.au

If you 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 browse.

Don't forget our tastings, the next one is on Tuesday June 3rd at 6.30pm.