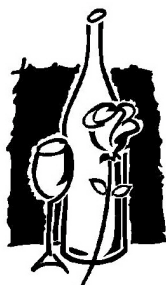


Alex's Newsletter

#18 July 2008



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Shadowfax 2006 Chardonnay

The region: A few from southern Vic

The alcohol: 13.5%

The taste: Figs, nectarines, elegant and very subtle oak

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



Shadowfax is a funky little winery down in Victoria, based in Werribee. They love to educate. Every Saturday at 4pm they do a tour of the winery and a guided tasting. It's nice to see the public getting to go behind the scenes a bit. Hell, they even let you in the underground barrel room. If you've ever wanted to get a feel for what a winery is all about, go here. They also have a pretty fancy setup for private functions, including a mouth watering function menu.

The winemaker is a guy called Matt Harrop. He's a Kiwi who came over here to study winemaking in South Australia before doing some time at Brokenwood and Nautilus. He's been working with wine since he was 17.

This wine has been kicking arse on the show circuit. At the Sydney Royal Wine Show this year, it picked up a gold medal and three trophies, including best white wine in the show. This is a really big deal, but not that surprising. The 2005 and 2004 chardies both did well at shows too.

The grapes mostly come from Geelong, but there's also some from the Macedon Ranges, Beechworth and the Cardinia Ranges. All cool climate which results in elegance.

The wine was made in a very old school style. Hand-picked, gentle whole-bunch pressing, 10 months in mostly old French oak for delicacy, natural (as opposed to cultured) yeasts and a moderate fermentation temperature.

You're looking for figs, nectarine and citrus. The wine hits every bit of the palate and will cellar well if you like. Put it with roast chicken or game.

Alsace

The region

Alsace has basically been in the middle of a tug-of-war between France and Germany for ages. It has changed nationality a few times over the centuries. It is currently on the French side of the border, but the wines display a strong German influence.

The region is a thin strip between the Rhine river on the east and the Vosges mountains on the west, between 175 and 420m above sea level. This altitude gives a good balance in temperature, drainage and sun exposure. The soils are really different from site to site too, giving quite a few different characteristics to the wines.

Sun exposure is important. Since the vineyards slope towards the east, they get the morning sun. The best vineyards have a southern exposure too, which means even more sun and therefore better ripening conditions. Plus, the wind mostly comes from the east, so they don't have to worry about that too much with the mountains providing shelter.

Appellations

Wine in Alsace is made under three appellations. Alsace AOC is for white, rosé and red wine. Alsace Grand Cru AOC is for whites made from the best vineyards and Crémant d'Alsace AOC is for sparkling wines.

Wines from Alsace usually bear the names of the grapes in the wines too, which is very unusual for French wine.

The classifications for late harvest (dessert) wines are *Vendange Tardive* and *Sélection de Grains Nobles*.

The wines

Almost all of the wines are white. The only reds are pinot noirs and are quite light, even for pinots. Most of the red grapes are made into rosé.

The whites are almost exclusively made from aromatic grape varieties, such as riesling, pinot blanc, gewürztraminer, pinot gris, sylvaner and muscat.

These grapes blend together quite well to produce aromatic, floral wines. Up until World War II, a lot of Alsace wines were quite sweet, similar to the German style. Since then, the trend has been to ferment the wines to dryness, ie, ferment all of the sugar into alcohol, in order to better match with food. This also means they can have quite high alcohol levels.

Producers

Some of the best producers include Hugel, Trimbach, Leon Bayer, Weinbach, Josmeyer and Marcel Deiss. The majority of these are family owned, including some of the biggest houses.

Producers mostly use their own grapes in their wines, but some of the bigger houses such as Hugel buy grapes from grape growers and make them into wine. This is called being a *négociant*. When a producer is called "Domaine" something, then they're meant to only use their own grapes.

Declassified wine

In the February 2008 newsletter, I outlined the appellation system in France. In Alsace, there is no *vin de pays* classification. Instead, any wine that does not fit under the Alsace appellation must be labelled as *vin de table*. This means they can't put the grape, region or vintage on the bottle.

Kaesler “Avignon” GSM 2006

The region: Barossa (SA)

The alcohol: 16.0%

The taste: Rich, ripe, dark plums

The price: \$35 or 10% off in a dozen



Avignon

You're not meant to use French region names on non-French wines, right? So how can they use Avignon if it's an area in the south of France?

Well, the name hasn't been classified as an appellation, so they can use it all they like. Plus, this style of wine is pretty typical of wines from Avignon in France, so it seems appropriate.

Plus, Popes used to live there. That just seemed worth mentioning given the events happening this month.

You all know I'm a big Kaesler fan. They're great at making reds and have been winning a lot of awards.

The 2006 Avignon picked up gold at the Melbourne Wine Show and highly recommended in Winewise Magazine. It's following on well from the success of the 2005 and 2004 vintage.

It also did well in another comp. This year, the twelve finalists for the Jimmy Watson trophy were announced. It didn't win, but it came close!

The trophy is awarded to the best one-year-old red tasted in barrel and it used to be a big deal. It has been won by famous names like Wolf Blass, De Bortoli, Katnook, Lindemans, Peter Lehmann and Penfolds. Recently, Casella Estate won it and its reputation has been on the slide since. Casella Estate are the guys who make Yellow Tail (cheap wine mostly exported to the US).

The argument against the trophy is that these reds are not a finished product. But for wines that are usually drunk young, like the Avignon, this isn't so much of an issue.

The Avignon comes from vines as old as 105 years and this particular vintage saw 18 months in barrel, longer than usual for this wine. So, when judged at 12 months old, it's pretty close to the finished product.

Is it really meant to be drunk young? Well, Kaesler release it early and the trend with GSM's at the moment is to drink them quickly... but this will fill out well over 10 years, so no touchy if you can help yourself. Good luck with that.

This is the big bro to the Stonehorse GSM (\$22) that many of you love.

O'Leary Walker Rieslings

The region: Clare Valley (SA)



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 August 5th at 6.30pm and will be a bit of a cracker! Bring your friends and have dinner afterwards.

David O'Leary and Nick Walker have a tonne of wine-making experience and have been making some waves since they opened shop around 7 years ago. I spent a few hours with Nick the other night discussing their range and the wine market in general. We spent a lot of time talking about riesling, as that is one of the things they do really well.

Most people think all rieslings are sweet. This comes from the super sweet German wines and the sweet rieslings of the 70's. These days, the vast majority of Oz and NZ riesling is quite dry and the marketing gurus are trying to get that message through.

It's a shame that people don't go near riesling much because they're fantastic value for money. They don't get much higher than \$30 or so here and the \$20 to \$30 stuff is quite often world class. Compare that to the top shelf chardonnays that hit \$100 or more. Riesling = bang for your buck.

Plus, it goes really well with seafood. We have a Cross City Tunnel that takes us right to the fish markets, so why not put it to good use?

O'Leary Walker have two rieslings, the Polish Hill River (\$24) and the Watervale (\$22). The former is mineral and steely while the latter is more fruit driven. The Watervale tastes a little sweeter, but both only have 2 grams per litre of residual sugar (1.5 gm/L is dry while sweeter wines have more, up at 300 gm/L for the Alsatian and German wines).

Both Polish Hill and Watervale are in the Clare Valley. It's fascinating to open them side by side and that's just what we did at the July monthly tasting. It's a great example of the influence of geography or *terroir*.