

Alex's Newsletter

#25 February

2009



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Kilikanoon Shiraz "Killerman's Run"

The region: South Australia

The alcohol: 15.0%

The taste: Fruit driven, long, warm

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



Kilikanoon has been making some pretty big waves recently. They're up in the Clare Valley, doing some lovely Shiraz in particular, as well as Grenache, Riesling and Cabernet. Their top shelf Shiraz, the Oracle, appears to be destined for some pretty substantial recognition... at least, that's what I heard through the grapevine (sorry).

Kevin Mitchell set it all up in 1997, so it's a pretty young winery. There are a number of people involved in it. The CEO's job title is Major Interferer, so they have a bit of a sense of humour.

Their wines come in a few levels. They have the Reserves, which includes The Oracle Shiraz and the Mort's Reserve Riesling (\$35 in the shop), amongst others.

They also make a few Regional wines, which showcase the effects of different wine regions on the same grape, Shiraz (or Syrah).

There are a few others in the portfolio, including Single Vineyard bits and pieces, so Kevin is certainly keeping himself busy making all these labels. The Killerman's Run reds are the entry level wines, sourced from a few different vineyards. Clearly these guys can get their hands on a lot of grapes, which is a good thing. It means they can pick and choose decent stuff each year, rather than being stuffed when there's a bad vintage.

The Killerman's Run Shiraz is a belter for the money. Rich, dense fruit and even a little bit of natural sediment in the wine, which goes along with the whole idea that it's best to leave the wine to do what it wants to do, rather than mucking around with it too much. Buy a dozen and sit on it for 5 years.

Organic wine and sulphur dioxide

A lot of consumers seem to be confused about what actually constitutes an organic or biodynamic wine, particularly in terms of sulphur dioxide, or preservative 220.

In the US, for a wine to be labelled as an organic wine, it must be made from grapes grown without artificial pesticides, fungicides or sprays and without the addition of sulphur dioxide during the winemaking process by the winemaker. However, you may see some US wines labelled as "made from organic grapes", where the grapes have been grown without pesticides, fungicides or sprays, but sulphur dioxide has been added during winemaking.

Sulphur dioxide is a preservative that serves a few very useful functions for a winemaker. It serves as an antibiotic and antioxidant, protecting wine from oxygen and bacteria, as well as keeping volatile acidity in check.

Most winemakers use very small amounts of sulphur dioxide - a common figure is about 50 parts per million (free). But a lot of people claim that they get allergic reactions or blocked sinuses from these wines, so they seek out organic wines instead.

The problem is that, in Australia, a wine can be labelled as organic if it contains sulphur dioxide (up to a limit). Many winemakers use organically grown grapes anyway as they believe this process produces the best flavours, but being certified as an organic producer is an expensive prospect that many producers just can't afford.

Even if they are organic producers, they often won't put it on their label as some consumers perceive organic produce as only for the hippie crowd anyway.

Sulphur dioxide isn't the only compound in a wine that can cause allergic reactions. Tartrates, natural histamines from the skins and high levels of acidity can all cause problems in different people. If you are having a problem with an allergic reaction to wine, you may need to do some tests to work out what exactly is causing the problem.

If you think it is sulphur dioxide, there are a range of products on the market that contain no added sulphur, such as the Hardy's No Added Preservative range (about \$18). Kaesler has started producing a red called Reid's Rasp (about \$35) that is only available at cellar door, so at the moment we can't get any in, but I will be chatting to the guys from Kaesler soon about that. The problem with the Hardy's wines at least is that, without the preservative, the wines don't last for more than a year. Each year we have to send them back to the winery as they start to fall apart. The Kaesler hasn't been around for long enough for me to make a judgement on its longevity yet.

So remember, just because you're getting a reaction to wine, sulphur dioxide may not be the culprit. Even if it is, buying organic wine will not help you there either, as they mostly contain sulphur dioxide. The best thing you can do is get an allergy test and try a whole bunch of different wines. Generally, I have found that consumers have less problems with older wines in both reds and whites. In reds, the lighter styles appear to produce the least allergic reactions.

Trends in the Barossa

I spent a couple of days in the Barossa over the January long weekend, chatting to some of the winemakers that I do business with along with a few new potentials too. It was fascinating to note the current trends in the area.

Cork vs screw cap debate

More and more producers are going towards screw caps rather than cork, as wine can often react with chemicals in a cork (eg TCA "cork taint") or because the wine ages more slowly and evenly under a screw cap. However, the cork producers have not given up and are creating composite corks (such as DIAM corks) that are guaranteed TCA free, or corks with different ends on them, also guaranteed TCA free.

I even managed to get myself into an argument with one of the winery workers about it for an hour. She believed screw caps were the only way forward. My belief is that all sorts of different closures have their place. It will be interesting to watch what happens here.

Big vs small producers

I went through a few big wineries and through a few small wineries too, some without a cellar door. From chatting to both sides, it appears that the larger wineries are increasingly reliant on the export market as Australian wine drinkers are starting to explore new labels regularly (at least with red wine). I think this is a good thing, but this also leads to a lot of small labels popping up that maybe shouldn't exist, particularly people who make wine for a hobby rather than for a living.

In the Barossa, most of the winemakers have been there for a few generations and have been brought up with wine, so this is less of an issue.

Oak- vs fruit-driven wines

There were less wines made using new oak, particularly new American oak, which imparts a stronger oaky vanilla influence on the wine. More producers are letting the fruit do the talking and focussing on elegance and structure, rather than creating massive blockbusters that knock you off your chair. Of course, there are still a lot of those around too! This seems to be a style that consumers are moving towards, as seen from sales figures as well as from chatting to people in the trade and customers at cellar door.

Where to go

If you are heading through the Barossa, some of the best cellar doors that I have found so far include (in no particular order):

- Torbreck
- Kaesler
- Charles Melton (great food too)
- Bethany
- Two Hands
- Ross Estate (particularly for the reds)
- Gibson
- The Willows

If you want to try a whole bunch of small producers from the Eden Valley (great Riesling and Shiraz in particular), try a Taste of Eden in Angaston. Tell Karina I sent you.

If you've just finished a tasting and aren't sure where to go next, just ask the cellar door staff, full of great ideas.

Past Newsletters

Past newsletters are available online www.rosebaydriveinliquorstore.com.au

Two Paddocks "Picnic" Pinot Noir 2007

The region: Central Otago (NZ)

The alcohol: 13.0%

The taste: Light, fresh cherries

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



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Ah Central Otago... I'm still trying to work out how they get anything to grow there at all, it's so freaking cold! But they do, and the Pinots coming out of there are actually pretty damn good. Other prominent labels include Mount Difficulty, Chard Farm and Felton Rd.

They're also quite expensive, no doubt because the poor buggers who work there have to pump their heaters up to full blast just to get through the winter. Heating costs money, you know!

Now Two Paddocks is a relatively young winery. Initially they released two Pinot Noirs, the "First Paddock" and the "Last Chance", both from single vineyards. Both were up around \$80 per bottle and very very hard to get. We usually only got two dozen of each per year. They don't seem to be making the Last Chance anymore, but instead have come out with an estate Pinot Noir, which appears to be a blend from a few vineyards.

They have also released a cheaper one, called the Picnic, as they "regard picnics as the best of times." And who are they? Well, the owner is Sam Neill, the actor guy who takes on dinosaurs and moon landings. He's not the winemaker, but it's his vision behind the brand. As he says, the aim is to make wines that they want to drink. If others like it too, then great. If not, no hassle, they'll get through it themselves with a few mates.

This wine is lighter and less complex than the top shelf wines, designed for sitting in the sun with family. The label even suggests that you should chill the bottle in the creek first! Those wacky Kiwis, always so quaint. Look for fresh, vibrant cherry flavours with balanced acidity. Great drinking, especially for the price.