

Alex's Newsletter

#28 May 2009



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Bindi Composition Pinot Noir 2005

The region: Macedon Ranges (VIC)

The alcohol: 14.0%

The taste: Completely feral, complex

The price: \$55 or 10% off in a dozen



Label from 2008 vintage, not 2005.

Stolen from the Bindi website.

Mark has been a long supporter of Bindi in the shop and always raves about them. I've tried them before and quite liked them, but it was a few vintages ago and had forgotten about them.

The other night I took home a Composition Pinot Noir 2005, which is one of the cheaper labels, behind the Original Vineyard, Block K and Block 5 Pinot Noirs. They also do some killer Chardonnay and Sparklings too.

Bindi is a tiny grower and is often mentioned in the same breath as Giaconda or Bass Phillip, both wineries that are pretty damn hard to get. The winemaker is Michael Dhillon, a young bloke who developed a passion for wine while studying... something that a lot of us can relate to.

I'd forgotten just how feral this wine is, and that's actually a good thing. It's a really complex gamey Pinot, lots of spice and complexity through it. Their aim when making it was to produce a harmonious, textured wine that is not as intense, complex nor ageworthy as the individual vineyard wines, all of which express the terroir of their sites, something that Michael is fanatical about (from what I've read anyway).

Despite this being not as intense as the top shelf stuff, it's still a full on Pinot and may not suit everyone, particularly those who haven't yet quite worked out what Pinot is all about. Or, it might knock them off their stool and make them buy a case. There's so much going on in the bottle here, it's hard to tell how anyone will react!

Either way, these wines are incredible, definitely worth trying. And this is definitely a producer to keep an eye on.

Wine tasting etiquette

Let's say you go to tastings with a few winemakers or companies showing off their range of wines. You want to walk around and taste all of the good ones, you might want to get a little happy and you might find some wines that you don't like too... so what's the best way to deal with all of this?

Tasting the good stuff

It is generally seen as poor form to walk up to a winemaker, ask only to taste his best wine and then walk away, but we don't want to taste 20 poor wines to get to 4 good ones either. So, the best thing to do is look through a particular range. If you want to try the top shelf Pinot by a producer, try some of their cheaper ones too... it's usually an interesting contrast between them anyway. However, don't feel obliged to try every wine on every table, that's not what tastings are about and you won't be able to taste anything by the end anyway!

Spit or swallow?

That's rude

Seriously

OK, at a tasting, you generally want to spit. You don't get that much more taste information from swallowing the wine if you taste it properly.

The best way to taste a wine is look at it for colour clues or opacity info, then smell it to work out what's coming your way... spend a long time smelling it too. Finally, put it into your mouth and keep it there. Swish it around, let the wine touch every bit of your mouth... different areas of your mouth are slightly differentially sensitive to different taste cues. Then, do that

awful slurping thing, where you draw air into your mouth while the wine is in there. This rushes airborne molecules above the wine up into your nose (aka retronasal smelling... look ma, I'm using Science!) which enhances your detection of various flavours in the wine. Then, you can spit it out... you'll still get an idea of the length of the wine too, from how long the taste hangs around.

In fact, if you don't spit, some winemakers will look at you funny and might even hide their good stuff from you as they'll think you're just there to get pissed. However, when you have a particularly tasty wine, it can be a compliment to say that you were going to spit, but it was too good.

Saying you don't like a wine

This needs to be done in a particularly careful way with some people as they'll take it personally. You can simply say "that one is not for me, but thanks for showing it to me".

I was in Adelaide in January at a festival where my friend and I came across a particularly crappy rosé - it was a bit old and was really falling apart. We asked the exhibitor if this is how it was meant to taste and said that it didn't seem right. He didn't bother to taste it, but instead told us that we would be charged money to taste any further wines. We moved on.

The other week, the winemaker from that place came through and I asked about that rosé. Apparently they're not making it anymore and had even ripped up the Grenache vines used to make it. They were trying to get rid of the last of it at that tasting. However, just because you're right in saying a wine is crap doesn't mean that it won't cost you money!

The 2004 Penfolds Grange - worth it?

Whenever a wine gets big reviews in the press, our phones ring off the hook with people desperate to get their hands on it. Same thing happened with the 2004 Penfolds Grange, which has been reviewed as "one of the best vintages on record" and scored 98 points out of 100 in more than one review, which is a phenomenal rating.

So everyone is dying to get their hands on this wine and are willing to shell out \$650 or so to be able to try it, particularly with the \$900 cash bonus that came out recently.

Is it worth it? That depends entirely on what you're using it for.

If you're buying this wine as an investment, don't bother. With the exception of the superfreaky awesome vintages of 1990 and 1998, most vintages of Grange made in the last decade or two auction for less than \$350, the vast majority of them in the \$200-\$300 price range. Considering that they retailed for between \$400 and \$500 at the time, particularly the vintages after 1990 (which was the one that put Grange on the international wine stage and also caused a huge price rise). Even the 1990 and 1998 are not worth what they were bought for at retail.

What about if you have a special anniversary coming up? I've had a few people say that it's their 40th wedding anniversary or something and that they want something amazing to drink to celebrate. This is also a bad reason to buy the 2004 Grange. When Max Schubert started making Grange, he was working on a wine that was

designed to mature. In fact, when he first started making it, the head honchos at Penfolds told him to stop making it because they thought it was undrinkable, but he kept making it and stashed it away behind a fake wall (sneaky bugger). A few years later, the brass at Penfolds revisited the original Grange offering and told him it was magnificent and that he should start making it again... then he revealed that he had been making it all along. So, if you want to drink an expensive wine and miss all of its beauty, buy the 04 and drink it now.

So what is the right reason to buy Grange? Well, if you want something that will age, say for your child who was born in 2004, that's a great reason. Or if you want a wine to put away for your retirement in a decade, go nuts and splurge. Just make sure that you cellar it well, as wine is fickle! A \$650 wine is just as easy to kill as a \$10 bottle, so look after it.

The only other reason that you might buy Grange is to show off... we all know someone like this, don't we?

So, I recommend that instead of spending \$650 on one bottle that might not be any good when you open it, spend it on a case of \$50ish per bottle red, some to drink now and some for later. And I have some absolute beltors in the shop at the moment too, so do drop in!

The Beast Magazine

Keep an eye out for my articles in the glossy magazine for the East, The Beast. The mag is a fun read and each month I give away a bottle of the wine I review... you just have to answer a simple question. Good luck!

Stonier 2007 Pinot Noir

The region: Mornington (VIC)

The alcohol: 13.0%

The taste: Spicy cherry, earthy

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



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Stonier is one of those wineries that can manage to produce decent Pinot even in crappy years. They also produce some great Chardonnay, but Pinot is really their specialty. These guys are one of the oldest on the Mornington Peninsula too.

In fact, they have four different Pinots and this one is the cheapest. And it's bloody scary just how good their cheapest Pinot is! I've seen some crazy reviews for it, including 96 points from Halliday... and you never see Pinot Noir at this price rated this highly.

It's a delicious wine, you can put it with food or you can just go nuts and drink it by itself (or by yourself, whatever turns you on).

It's a really fruit driven style, there is some oak there, but they really let the wonderful Pinot fruit shine (as you should do). It's got a lot of depth to it, it's really quite complex without being feral, which is in stark contrast to the Bindi Composition Pinot Noir on the front page.

So what are the other reds? The Reserve Pinot Noir goes for about \$50 and comes from the oldest vineyards. Lots of work done to this one, lots of flavour, even more complex.

Then they have the single vineyard KBS and Windmill Pinot Noirs, both around \$60ish, from special parcels that they identified in the Reserve.

Bloody good value and fantastic with food.

Past newsletters are available online:
www.rosebayliquor.com.au