

LANGHORNE CREEK

The Langhorne Creek wine region lies very close to Lake Alexandrina, about ten kilometres east of Strathalbyn, within easy travelling distance of the city of Adelaide. The vineyards cover about 6,000 ha, representing an impressive growth from 200 ha in the mid 1980s. Large companies in particular saw the benefits of almost-flat land which benefited from a moderating ocean influence.

Although there are no hills or significant slopes, the region can be divided into the lower flood plain of the Angas and Bremer Rivers and the slightly higher (about 10 metres) older soils. For a quick view from a helicopter, see the short video I shot.

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10205594862645615&pnref=story>

The first vines were planted by the Potts family in the 1850s, and the oldest vines are to be found in the 1890s Metala vineyard, now owned by Brothers In Arms.

Climatically, the Langhorne Creek region sits midway between McLaren Vale and Mount Barker (Adelaide Hills) in terms of heat degree days and mean January temperature. This has a significant effect on wine style, and the reds of Langhorne Creek seldom display the very ripe fruit characteristics often found in the wines of McLaren Vale and the Barossa Valley.

I visited Langhorne Creek last month, courtesy of the wine producers, and tasted a wide range over two days. Here's how they showed. Prices as supplied by the producers. Top value wines shown in **red**.

WHITE WINES

2014 Lake Breeze Reserve Chardonnay Fresh figs and white peach are apparent, as are barrel ferment inputs including low-level funkiness. A well made, textural chardonnay. (\$25.00) ★★★★★

2014 Bleasdale Old Vine Verdelho This wine has an attractive lemon sherbet nose. The palate offers citrus richness, with good acid and phenolic balance. (\$29.00) ★★★★★

2014 Bremerton Mollie & Merle Verdelho Shows both lemon pulp and lemon rind characteristics. There's good weight of fruit, balanced acid, and a pleasant, if slightly firm, finish. (\$17.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 Bremerton Special Release Fiano Apples and a hint of dried herbs show on the nose. There's quite a bit of grip on the palate which tends to dominate the fruit. Call it textural. (\$24.00) ★★★

2013 Bremerton Battonage Chardonnay Fresh and peachy, with a nutty overtone and a hint of sulphides. Fresh but a bit plain and firm in the mouth. (\$32.00) ★★★

2015 Lake Breeze Vermentino Fresh pear/lightly tropical characteristics, with a hint of grass. Good fruit with a phenolic grip. (\$18.00) ★★★

2014 Bremerton Special Release Vermentino Somewhat citrus-like, but plain. There's a slight coarseness on the palate. (\$24.00) ★★☆☆

2012 Temple Bruer Chenin Blanc Cooked apple and hay. Fairly coarse palate. (\$18.00) ★★☆☆

2014 Angas Plains Unwooded Chardonnay Simple and peachy, with reductive elements. Plain. (\$18.00) ★★☆☆

Good chardonnay can obviously be made in Langhorne Creek, but it will never achieve the quality levels of regions like Margaret River and the Yarra Valley. Verdelho has a home beside Lake Alexandrina, and, as some producers have already realised, the time is right for fiano and vermentino. Langhorne Creek is the ideal place to work with niche varieties, and the possibilities are limited only by imagination, but it seems that grapes (both white and red) that thrive in a Mediterranean environment will be well suited.

SHIRAZ & BLENDS

2013 Bleasdale Powder Monkey Shiraz This classy red is overtly fruity and aromatic, showing rose petal and positive gamy overtones. The classy French oak adds spicy complexity, and a very attractive palate offers supple savoury tannins and good balance. Here we have both quality and drinkability. (\$65.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Lake Breeze Bernoota Shiraz Cabernet It would be hard not to like the attractive fresh mulberry aroma and flavour. It's a nicely constructed wine, with savoury tannins and a lick of oak. (\$22.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Lake Breeze Section 54 Shiraz The ripe dark berry characteristics show a touch of Langhorne Creek mint. This is a vibrant, approachable wine that has a future. (\$25.00) ★★★★★

2012 Bremerton Old Adam Shiraz A brooding blackberry shiraz of considerable substance. Built for the long haul - intense and firm - with its share of oak. Sealed with cork. (\$56.00) ★★★★★

2013 Bleasdale Broadside Shiraz Cabernet Malbec Very punchy, attention-grabbing red fruits. A good fresh, flavoursome drink-now style. (\$16.00) ★★☆☆

2013 Gipsie Jack Terrier Shiraz Cabernet Plenty of ripe dark berry fruit well supported by a whiff of oak. Quite substantial and fresh, and the fruit weight matches the astringency. (\$18.00) ★★★☆

2012 Lake Breeze Winemaker's Selection Shiraz Very impressive fresh blackberry with a suggestion of oak. The oak occupies a prominent place on the palate which offers bright, vibrant fruit. (\$35.00) ★★★☆

2013 Bleasdale The Petrel Shiraz Cabernet Malbec Attractive influence of raspberry malbec. Soft and approachable. (\$30.00) ★★★☆

2013 Lake Breeze Bullant Shiraz Lightish, but fresh red fruit aromas, and the palate is medium weight. Ready for drinking. (\$16.00) ★★★☆

2013 Karrawatta Joseph Shiraz Big and ripe, with a layer of oak. The dark berry fruit is intense, but there's too much wood. (\$54.00) ★★★☆

2012 Angas Plains PJ's Shiraz Classic Langhorne Creek fruit and mint. Drinking quite well now. (\$25.00) ★★★☆

2008 Brothers In Arms Shiraz Showing some mature leathery character. Still has sweet mid palate fruit, but is at its peak. (\$45.00) ★★★

2012 Ben Potts Fiddles Block Shiraz Attractive mulberry with a lash of oak which is a little too overt, but the fruit is fresh. (\$40.00) ★★★

2012 Kimbolton Rifleman Shiraz A mix of red fruits and oak with a hint of mint. It has length and power but is a too oaky. (\$50.00) ★★★

2012 Heartland Directors' Cut Shiraz Rich and ripe, but a little advanced. Plain and chewy. (\$33.00) ★★★☆

2012 Angas Plains Emily Cross Shiraz Slightly too advanced, but shows blackberry fruit with hints of mint and oak. The finish is a bit too dry and oaky. (\$40.00) Cork ★★★☆

2013 Noon Reserve Langhorne Creek Shiraz The colour indicates development, as does the nose. It's already into a secondary phase, and mouth-coating tannins dominate. (\$40.00) ★★

Shiraz thrives in Langhorne Creek, as it does in most regions of Australia. The best wines are a little bigger than medium-bodied, but not to the point of being jammy. That's a comfortable niche, and I recommend that you explore this fertile field.

MALBEC



2012 Bleasdale Double Take Malbec The very powerful mulberry/blueberry aromas carry a hint of violets, and the palate is succulent and opulent, with delightful fine tannins. (\$65.00) ★★★★★

2013 Zonte's Footstep Malbec Very appealing fresh rose petal and red fruits aromas. A delightful, "juicy" malbec, bursting with fruit and balanced by savoury tannins. (\$25.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Bleasdale Generations Malbec Vibrant rose petal and raspberry aromas and flavours. Opulent and savoury. Delicious. (\$35.00) ★★★★★

2013 Brothers In Arms Side By Side Malbec Very attractive plum/raspberry nose. Fresh and easy to drink, although it shows its acidity. (\$27.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Bremerton Special Release Malbec Concentrated, fresh and plummy. Lovely fruit, slightly furry tannins and obvious oak. (\$24.00) ★★★★★

2012 Wolf Blass Gold Label Malbec Intense dark berries and oak. Very good fruit overoaked. (\$30.00) ★★★

The Argentinians and the citizens of Cahors in south-west France think that they make the world's best malbecs. I suggest that they try a few of Langhorne Creek's finest. Their confidence may be undermined.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON & BLENDS

2013 Bleasdale Frank Potts Cabernet Sauvignon Blackcurrant, spice and rose petals show on a very impressive nose, and the long palate features supremely fine tannins. This is what Langhorne Creek is all about. (\$35.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Bremerton Coulthard Cabernet Sauvignon A powerful, youthful cassis style that shows off delicious, perfectly ripe, fresh, varietal fruit on a well balanced palate.. (\$22.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Bleasdale Iron Duke Cabernet Sauvignon Powerful cassis aromas and flavours are enhanced by a touch of oak. The opulent fruit is matched to tannins which are quite firm. Patience will be rewarded. (\$65.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Bremerton B.O.V. Cabernet Shiraz This wine offers very fresh, intense dark berry with a layer of slightly charry oak. The fruit and oak are quite a good fit. Needs time. (\$85.00) Cork seal ★★★★★☆

2013 Lake Breeze Cabernet Sauvignon Classic Langhorne Creek violets fragrance. Lovely savoury tannins match the blackcurrant fruit very well. Oak shows on both nose and palate. (\$24.00) ★★★★★

2010 Cleggett Wines Men of Kent Cabernet Sauvignon Fresh, leafy red fruits bouquet. It's strongly varietal in both fruit and structure. The tannins are firm but fine, and the finish is long. (\$25.00) ★★★★★

2012 Bremerton Walter's Cabernet Sauvignon Very intense dark berry with obvious oak. The palate is concentrated, but still offers some cassis varietal flavour. Needs time to soften. (\$56.00) Cork seal ★★★★★

2012 Lake Breeze Arthur's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon Very rich cassis. It's at the ripe end but still shows obvious cabernet character. Sweet oak plays a part. Lovely fruit, but a little too much oak. (\$35.00) ★★★★★

2013 Karrawatta Christo's Paddock Cabernet Sauvignon Ripe, powerful and oaky, with puckering tannins. V8 cabernet at full throttle. (\$54.00) ★★★★★

2013 Bleasdale Mulberry Tree Cabernet Sauvignon Attractively fresh and varietal. Good early drinking. (\$20.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Ben Potts Lenny's Block Cabernet Sauvignon An opulent cassis style of cabernet with a lash of sweet oak. Cabernet with the volume turned up. (\$40.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Gipsie Jack Cabernet Sauvignon Fresh dark berry with a whiff of violets. Rich, ripe and offering plenty for the price. (\$18.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Wolf Blass Grey Label Cabernet Shiraz Rich dark fruits, with a woody underlay. Gorgeous fruit undermined by oak. (\$50.00) ★★★★★☆

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2009 Brothers In Arms Cabernet Sauvignon Shows some obvious development as well as blackcurrant and tobacco leaf. Firm and fairly plain. (\$50.00) ★★★

2012 Kimbolton Fig Tree Cabernet Sauvignon Rich dark fruits and obvious charry oak. Ripe and oaky. (\$24.00) ★★★

2012 Angas Plains PJ's Cabernet Sauvignon At the ripe end for cabernet but makes a strong impression. Retains just enough varietal character, but the tannins are quite furry. (\$25.00) ★★★

2012 Kimbolton Rifleman Cabernet Sauvignon Very fresh leafy, spicy red berry. The palate is lively, but a bit bony. (\$50.00) ★★★

2012 John's Blend Cabernet Sauvignon Very obvious oak dominates fresh fruit. (\$32.00) ★★☆☆

2012 Noon Reserve Cabernet Weak colour. Quite musty and earthy. Slightly hot and stewed. ★

Is this Australia's most under-rated cabernet region? Given appropriate attention to viticulture, cabernet sauvignon produces top quality red wines in Coonawarra most years. In cool vintages McLaren Vale can deliver remarkable examples. It follows that Langhorne Creek, neatly positioned between the two, climatically and geographically, is eminently suited to the cultivation of cabernet sauvignon.

OTHER REDS



2013 Bremerton Special Release Lagrein Impressive plums and cherries plus a whiff of dried herbs show on the nose. The palate is intense, with lingering fine tannins. A great Aussie interpretation of a wonderful northern Italian varietal. (\$24.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Bremerton Special Release Graciano Hints of rose petal. Quite savoury and secondary, with a hint of graphite. Lovely palate - medium-weight sweet fruit with a European savoury touch. (\$24.00) ★★★★★☆

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2014 Bleasdale GSM Fresh, fragrant rose petal. Very lively and fruity, with savoury tannins. Excellent drinking. (\$25.00) ★★★★★

2013 Zonte's Footstep Sangiovese Barbera Perfumed red fruits/cherry. Generous palate with very fine savoury tannins. (\$25.00) ★★★★★

2013 Heartland Dolcetto & Lagrein Rich, ripe and plummy, showing oak. It has plenty of flavour but is a bit angular. (\$20.00) ★★★☆

2014 Handcrafted by Geoff Hardy Graciano Very fresh, with a hint of licorice. A firm, savoury red with lingering tannins. (\$30.00) ★★★☆

2013 Blackbilly Sangiovese Ripe dark fruits. Impressive mid palate richness, but the tannins are puckering. (\$22.00) ★★★☆

2012 Bremerton Special Release Barbera Attractive red fruits with a brambly hint. Rich but decidedly dry, with a typical acid finish that needs taming. (\$24.00) ★★★☆

2013 Casa Freschi La Signora (Nebbiolo, shiraz, malbec)
Attractive nebbiolo perfume. A little lean but very fresh, with commendably fine tannins. (\$45.00) Cork seal ★★★☆

2014 Alpha Box & Dice Rebel Rebel (Montepulciano) Very fresh dark cherry. Good quaffing, but on the light side. (\$25.00) ★★☆☆

2010 Rusticana Durif Ripe, rustic and slightly too advanced. Solid chewy tannins. (\$30.00) ★★

The “alternates” have great potential in Langhorne Creek. Without stretching credibility, I can see nero d'avola, tempranillo, aglianico and negroamaro delivering the goods as well.

The Reds In General

It's easy to report that Langhorne Creek is the place to look for red wines that deliver in terms of quality:price. There are several wines in the report that offer excellent value-for-money, “everyday” drinking. But Langhorne Creek is much more than a red wine supermarket. The winemakers of the “Creek” have proven that they can deliver at the very top end.

However, with that comes a cautionary word. Oak is not necessarily your friend. I think “cellar palate” has led to too many over-oaked wines. That oak may come in the form of barrels, chips or staves, but the result is essentially the same. I suggest to some producers that they hire an “outside” tasting consultant when it comes to composing final blends, and, before that, think carefully about oak usage.

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The familiar Langhorne Creek “minty” character was apparent in some wines. I really should call it river red gum character because it is derived from those noble native trees. A hint can be positive, but when it is the dominant character it’s just like too much oak, in that it dominates the wine. Put excessive oak and overt eucalypt character together and you really have a problem.

Langhorne Creek is only one hour’s drive from the centre of Adelaide, making it an easy day trip from the capital. There are several welcoming cellar doors, and The Winehouse <http://www.thewinehouse.com.au/> and the Bridge Hotel <http://langhornehotel.com.au/> offer more than pleasant dining options.

SHALISTIN (White cabernet sauvignon)

Cleggett wines in Langhorne Creek have something unique to offer. “ A chance discovery of pinky bronze fruit on a cabernet sauvignon vine in 1977 provided Mac Cleggett the opportunity to propagate a single (cane) cutting at his Langhorne Creek vineyard. This bronze cabernet sauvignon grape was initially registered as malian. Several years later (1991), through the same process of nature, the white cabernet sauvignon grape was identified and initially registered as shalistin. “ <http://www.cleggettwiner.com.au/about-cleggett-wines/>

There are two hectares of shalistin at Cleggett Wines, and the best examples of this exclusive white are well worth tasting. Several vintages are on sale for \$18.00 per bottle. The best of them are:

2006 Fresh, mature, not unlike semillon. Lovely fruit. Packed with flavour. Good phenolics. ★★★★★

2007 Mature citrus, slightly nutty. Good drink. Fresh, with admirable fruit weight. ★★★

2008 Shows attractive honeyed maturity with good phenolics. ★★★

2009 Rich and stone-fruity. Drinking very well. ★★★

2010 Fresh and lemony. Good fresh palate. ★★★☆

2015 Fresh, slight passionfruit. Rich and sauvignon-like. ★★★

Winery contact details (producers with wines rating 4½ - 5 stars)

<http://www.bleasdale.com.au/>

<http://www.bremerton.com.au/>

<http://www.lakebreeze.com.au/>

<http://www.zontesfootstep.com.au/> (Not located in Langhorne Creek)

Lester Jesberg

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