

## WOLF BLASS BLACK LABEL

**W**olf Blass Black Label, now an elite Australian red-wine brand, was born, and burst into the headlines, via the Jimmy Watson Trophy – in fact, three consecutive Jimmy Watson Trophies – from 1973 to 1975 inclusive.



Expert opinion in the seventies strongly suggested that Wolf Blass produced “show wines” that wouldn’t age. The prevailing view was that red wines had to be sturdy in their youth if they were to be successfully cellared. Wolf and his winemaker John Glaetzer produced reds that were svelte and not afraid to show their new oak. Forty years later we’re certainly in a position to see if they aged gracefully.

**1973 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** Browning colour. The nose is fully mature and cedary, but still has considerable attraction. The palate is even better than the nose suggests, still offering some fruit sweetness. If you have a bottle, enjoy it now while it still offers drinking pleasure. Not bad for an early-drinking flash in the pan. (Made from Langhorne Creek & Eden Valley material) ★★★★★

*This wine was made at Tolley Scott & Tolley, as were the 1974 and 1975. Small fermenters were used, and the batches were kept separate and blended just prior to bottling. The material was originally intended for Grey Label, but after winning the trophy, Wolf Blass decided to blend the best barrels and launch Black Label.*

**1974 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** Browned off and terminally oxidised. Desperately clinging to some fruit but well and truly in decay. (Langhorne Creek, Coonawarra) ★

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**1975 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** Very mature but showing some fruit. The palate still has something to offer, although there are signs of drying out. Definitely well into its drinking window, but still enjoyable. (Langhorne Creek, Barossa Valley) ★★★☆

**1978 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** Rich but mature, showing Vegemite overtones. It has palate richness and some sweet fruit, although the tannins are somewhat furry. Still holding on. (Langhorne Creek, Barossa Valley, Clare Valley) ★★★☆

**1982 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** Complex, leathery and mature but still offering sweetness of fruit. The finish is firm and very cabernet-driven, with characteristics of cooler areas. (Langhorne Creek, Barossa Valley, Clare Valley) ★★★☆



*Wolfie*

**1984 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot Shiraz** Shows developed, slightly minty cabernet sauvignon characteristics, and still retains fruit leading to a firm finish. (Langhorne Creek, Clare Valley, Eden Valley, McLaren Vale) ★★★

*The Wolf Blass operation may have been flying high by this stage, but it didn't own a single crusher until the purchase of Quelltaler in 1986.*

**1992 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** Shows comparatively fresh red fruits and cigar box character, although it's a little one-dimensional. Drinking well. (Langhorne Creek, Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale, Clare Valley, Eden Valley) ★★★☆

**1998 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz Merlot** As good as the 1973 is, this is the seminal Black Label. It is a wine of opulent cassis and dark berry with excellent oak integration. It's powerful, long and balanced, still needing 3-5 years to peak. (Barossa Valley, Langhorne Creek, McLaren Vale) ★★★★★

*Made at Saltram. The first vintage with significant French oak. "Just imagine how great it would have been under screwcap." Chief winemaker Chris Hatcher.*

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Speaking of screwcaps, Chris Hatcher arranged for two bottlings of the 2002 to be served – one under cork, the other under metal.

**2002 Wolf Blass Black Label Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon Malbec**

There's no shortage of blackberry richness here, and there are still some youthful characteristics. A solid wine with plenty of flavour and a firm finish. (Barossa Valley, Langhorne Creek) ★★★★★ Screwcap

**2002 Wolf Blass Black Label Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon Malbec**

Rich but showing maturity, and, when presented with the challenge of picking cork from screwcap, the faint smell of cork wood helped give it away. The finish is drying, but hanging onto fruit. ★★★★★

*The discussion revolved around drinkability. Several at the table asserted that the wine sealed with cork was a better drink now, but all agreed that the one under screwcap would continue to improve. I suspect, however, that the cork-sealed bottle was a particularly good example. All post-2002 Black Labels are screw-capped.*

**2004 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz Malbec**

If you love the blackberry style of red wine, with an overlay of new oak, look for this one at auction. The vibrant fruit is matched to supple tannins, and the finish is long and impressive. ★★★★★

**2010 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz**

A wine that is very fresh, but very much at the ripe end. New oak wafts up, but there's great intensity of aroma and flavour. Everything is there waiting to be unleashed. The high point of this wine is the tannin management. Cellar 20 years. (Current release - \$103.00) ★★★★★

**2012 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz**

Here we have vibrant cassis with prominent but compatible oak. Although the oak shows obviously, there's great fruit underneath. Given the established track record of Black Label, this one needs three decades. ★★★★★

**2013 Wolf Blass Black Label Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz Malbec**

This wine is still very much in its primary phase. The nose is a youthful berry melange with prominent French oak. Taste-wise, it's a combination of outstanding fruit and fine, firm tannins. Definitely a wine for the long term. ★★★★★

Wolf Blass and John Glaetzer got it mostly right back in 1973. Oak notwithstanding, there was a drinkability about the wines that caused the critics to damn them with faint praise. The style has evolved, mostly positively, and I strongly commend the youngsters to you for cellaring.

However, remembering the wines of the seventies and eighties when they were young, I think today's versions are tauter, tighter and less immediately drinkable. That's not a criticism, but I feel the style could become more open in its youth without sacrificing quality or longevity.

Lester Jesberg

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