

SHAW + SMITH

The Shaw + Smith team recently arrived in Canberra for their annual luncheon announcing the 2016 releases. On hand to talk about the wines were Michael Hill Smith MW and Dan Coward, Trade Sales and Education Manager.

2016 Sauvignon Blanc This wine has a well-earned reputation as one of Australia's best sauvignons, and the 2016 release follows on well from excellent former vintages. Typically tight and restrained, this wine shows citrus peel and ripe grapefruit on the nose. The palate is zesty, pure and flavoursome, with a delicate, phenolic-free finish. Refreshing drinking over the coming summer. (\$26.00) ★★★★★

2014 Lenswood Vineyard Chardonnay From one of the coolest vineyards in the Adelaide Hills, and only 180 dozen made. Twenty percent of the wine went through malolactic fermentation. On the nose, there are citrus and melon notes, combined with plenty of sulphidic "funk". The palate is delicate and finely structured, with a mixture of white peach, nectarine and grapefruit flavours. The result is a pure, vibrant chardonnay which proudly displays its cool climate origins. Will cellar for at least ten years. (\$85.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 M3 Chardonnay A mainstay of the Shaw and Smith line-up, the M3 has always been a reliable and high-quality showcase for the best of Adelaide Hills wine. Ripe stone fruit, green apple and nutty flavours, rounded out by a touch of creamy barrel ferment, fill the mouth. The palate is long and satisfying, with a nice lift from the acid line. Enjoy over the next six to eight years. (\$44.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 Adelaide Hills Pinot Noir A perfumed, delicate, pretty pinot that is enticing from the first sip. The nose shows an abundance of sweet red cherry and a touch of vanilla. The palate is light, soft and silky, with gentle support provided by the French oak. Delicious drinking now and over the next few years. (\$45.00) ★★★★★

2014 Balhannah Vineyard Shiraz The second release of this label. The vineyard itself sits at around 400 metres above sea level and is planted to several varieties, including an old Tahbilk clone of shiraz from central Victoria. Seventy percent whole bunches, and fermentation in large oak barrels. The nose shows strongly of stems, giving a distinct green edge to the red-berry-and-spice fruit. Those aromas flow onto the palate, which is marked by its delicacy and fine, powdery tannins. This wine needs time, and will cellar for a decade or more. (\$85.00) ★★★★★

2014 Adelaide Hills Shiraz The regional blend of Adelaide Hills shiraz finishes our tasting on a high note. A classically perfumed nose of rose petal, cherry and sweet spice leads to a balanced, flavoursome palate full of red and dark fruits. The tannins are fine but firm, and support the fruit through to a long finish. A generous and satisfying exemplar of cool climate Australian shiraz. (\$44.00) ★★★★★☆

Lex Howard

VOYAGER ESTATE

Once again the annual Voyager Estate tasting came to Canberra, and this year it was my pleasure to attend on behalf of Winewise. The team from Margaret River show admirable confidence in their product by presenting their latest-release cabernet blends and chardonnays in “blind” tastings against some of the best from around the world. As you see in my comments below, this confidence is not misplaced. I have listed the wines below in the order in which we tasted them.

CHARDONNAY

2014 Neudorf Moutere Chardonnay This chardonnay from the Nelson region of New Zealand is a big, rich style, showing ripe stone fruit and buttery malolactic fermentation elements. These are balanced somewhat by the good acid backbone, and the oak is not overdone. Plenty of flavour for your (considerable) money. (\$80.00) ★★★★★

2013 Saint-Aubin Les Frionnes Chardonnay (Hubert Lamy) Here we have a premier cru from the Côte de Beaune, showing the typical Burgundian mandarin peel and nutty barrel ferment characters. The palate is full of classic white peach, racy acid, and a slightly chalky textural component. It’s long and generous, and will cellar well. A great effort from what was a difficult year in Burgundy. (\$115.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 Voyager Estate Broadvale Block 6 Chardonnay This wine used to be labelled Project 95, a reference to the Dijon 95 clone vines planted on this block in 2004. Very racy and quite sharp at first, the palate softens to a textural display of gentle citrus combined with powdery phenolics. Deliberately restrained and backward, with the grapes being picked early to preserve natural acidity and undergoing “natural” fermentation in French barriques. Flavour should build nicely in the coming years, so don’t rush. (\$65.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 Voyager Estate Broadvale Block 5 Chardonnay Previously known as the Gin Gin, after the clone of chardonnay planted on this block on 2003. A typical Margaret River nose of fresh grapefruit, apple and citrus leads to a fine and balanced palate. There is a nice purity to this wine, with a touch of minerality to add complexity to the peach and nutty flavours. However, the fruit lacks sufficient intensity to carry all the way through the palate. (\$65.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 Voyager Estate Tom Price Chardonnay A new addition to the Tom Price super-premium label from Voyager, this is a blend of the Broadvale Blocks 5 (43%) and 6 (57%). As expected, it combines all the features of those two wines, and they have blended into a superb, harmonious whole. The flavour and texture of the Block 5 is lifted to new heights by the racy acid of the Block 6 to deliver a seamless, tightly-wound chardonnay with great poise. Due for release later in 2016. (\$90.00) ★★★★★

2014 By Farr Chardonnay Gary and Nick Farr have long had a reputation for making rich, complex wines, full of flavour, from their vineyard near Geelong, and this wine does nothing to dispel that reputation. It is quite deeply coloured, with a palate of ripe stone fruit overlain by vanilla oak. Flavour, texture, richness and complexity are the hallmarks of this heavily-worked chardonnay. (\$75.00) ★★★★★

2013 Flowers Sonoma Coast Chardonnay Those who thought Californian chardonnays were all big, heavy, buttery monsters will be surprised with this wine from the Sonoma Coast just north of San Francisco. The nose is fresh and lively, showing citrus and white peach in a nicely restrained package. The palate is quite delicate, with bright acid balanced beautifully with just enough creamy barrel ferment character. It has lovely flavour and texture, without heaviness, and is a delightful drink. (\$80.00) ★★★★★☆

2014 Voyager Estate Chardonnay The “standard” Voyager Estate Chardonnay stands up very well in this top company. A blend of fruit from seven blocks of the estate, all individually hand-picked. The nose of stone fruit, pear and ripe grapefruit leads to a flavoursome, linear palate, of which the crisp acidity is a feature. A very attractive chardonnay which will provide excellent drinking over the next ten years. (\$45.00) ★★★★★

2014 Hamilton Russell Vineyards Chardonnay Here’s a wine for lovers of big, full-on chardonnays. From the Hemel-en-Aarde (Heaven on Earth) Valley south-east of Cape Town in South Africa, this wine holds nothing back. The nose shows considerable development, with overriding honeysuckle and mown hay aromas. The palate is forward and oaky, with ripe yellow peach flavours and buttery complexity. Drink now. (\$78.00) ★★★

CABERNET

2012 Matthiasson Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon Very sweet raspberry nose, with some almond in the background. A fresh, juicy cabernet in which the ripe, sweet fruit has enough intensity to handle the considerable amount of oak. (\$85.00 - not on sale in Australia) ★★★★★

2012 Voyager Estate Project North Block Cabernet Sauvignon This is a beautiful expression of Margaret River cabernet. The somewhat light colour is deceptive, because the nose swims in classic cassis aromas, with that touch of leaf which is a cabernet hallmark. The palate is long and fine, with generous flavours and soft but persistent tannins. Drinking beautifully now but will age gracefully for up to 20 years. (\$90.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Voyager Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot A bright but firm wine, with hints of early complexity developing. There’s plenty of red fruit flavour, held in place by the abundant tannins from a higher than usual (91%) component of cabernet sauvignon. (\$70.00) ★★★★★

2012 Woodlands Thomas Cabernet Sauvignon There's plenty of cedary oak evident in this wine, but there's also plenty of rich black fruits to balance it. The hope is that the fruit will soak up the oak in time, in which case the wine will be a powerful, iron-fist-in-velvet-glove expression of cabernet. (\$150.00) ★★☆☆

2012 Château Cos d'Estournel This famous second growth from Bordeaux's Saint-Estèphe commune has a firm, powerful nose of rich cassis and cedar oak. There's a whiff of brettanomyces, too, but not enough to distract. The wine seems heavily extracted, and the drying tannins lead to a fairly hard finish. (\$365.00) ★★☆☆

2012 Voyager Estate Project Old Block Cabernet Sauvignon This is another wonderful cabernet from the Voyager Project. The nose is classic Australian cabernet, with cassis, red fruits, bay leaf, and a hint of liquorice all playing a part. The tannins are fine and firm, the exemplary fruit supported by oak on a linear path to a long and satisfying finish. Put some away and forget them for several years. (\$90.00) ★★★★★

2012 Voyager Estate Tom Price Cabernet Sauvignon Like its chardonnay partner, the Tom Price Cabernet Sauvignon is made from a blend of the best two individual blocks on the estate – Old Block and North Block. It has a somewhat closed, brooding nose, but a vibrant and seamless palate of bright fruit and firm tannins. The finish is very long indeed. Due for release in 2017. (\$150.00) ★★★★★☆

2012 Spottswode Estate Cabernet Sauvignon This wine is from St Helena in California's Napa Valley, and is the very epitome of brooding, intense cabernet. The colour is inky purple, the nose subdued, and the palate powerful but refined. The oak makes an appearance, but the fruit is so intense that overall balance is maintained. The aromatics of the wine are lifted by the small (10%) component of cabernet franc, with hints of violets floating up from the glass. (\$245.00) ★★★★★

2012 Ornellaia This famous "super-Tuscan" from the Bolgheri DOC in central Italy is a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and petit verdot. The nose shows intense black fruits with a whiff of cedar oak. On the palate, the wine is very firm, and chalky tannins dry the mouth. It's big and extracted, with a charry oak finish. A long time in the cellar may aid the softening of the tough palate, but at the moment it is unbalanced. (\$290.00) ★★★★★☆

A wonderful tasting showing once again that Voyager Estate's wines can hold their head high in any company.

Lex Howard

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