

# INTERNATIONAL SHIRAZ TASTING

**I**t was the turn of shiraz in our annual international tasting, and the selections this year took in Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Spain and the USA. Thirteen judges (see the foot of the article) assessed the 20 shiraz which were poured in random order, out of sight of all the tasters, by our stewards. The wines are reviewed in order of preference (average score), and the number of gold medal scores is shown at the end of each review.

Only Lester Jesberg knew what wines had been selected for tasting, and he was unaware of the judging order. The span of vintages was 2011-2013, and the tasting was conducted on 2 September, 2016.

## Clonakilla



**2013 Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier** This Canberra district wine has earned a world-wide reputation, and it's easy to see why. The fragrance is captivating, combining with black pepper/spice and hints of whole-bunch complexity. If you're looking for a shiraz to epitomise silky palate texture, this is it. Yes, the winemaker Tim Kirk was on the panel, but even when we removed his score, the Clonakilla prevailed in a tight four-way photo finish. (\$89.95) ★★★★★ **8 gold medal scores**  
<https://theredwineshop.com.au/collections/red-wine/products/clonakilla-shiraz-viognier-2013-750ml-canberra-district>



**2013 Trinity Hill Homage Syrah** Hawkes Bay has cemented its position as a leading wine region on the international stage, and this syrah is one of its finest. It's perfumed and spicy, hinting at rose petal, and the palate is intense and firm, but impeccably balanced, with a delightfully savoury finish. (no longer available) ★★★★★ 9

**2013 Giaconda Warner Vineyard Shiraz** Another wine which shows an almost ethereal fragrance, again suggesting red roses, and perhaps violets. There are also very positive spice and herb influences. Power and finesse meld seamlessly on a long, fine palate. From Beechworth, Victoria. (\$79.00) ★★★★★ 8  
<http://www.mwwines.com.au/museum-wine-shop/wines/wine-item/Giaconda/Warner-Vineyard-Shiraz/Shiraz/2013/00042013960201300001>

**2012 Henschke Mount Edelstone Shiraz** This is a wonderfully supple shiraz which reflects ripe yet vibrant fruit. There's a hint of chocolate which complements the dark berry and cherry flavours, and the balance is exemplary. Decades of life lie ahead. (\$135.00) ★★★★★ 8  
<http://canterburywines.net/Categories/Shiraz.htm>

**2012 Mount Langi Ghiran Langi Shiraz** The perfumed, herbal, peppery aromas are very enticing, and the palate is a joy – long, fine and satisfying, with everything in its place. (\$110.00) ★★★★★ 7  
<http://store.banksfinewine.com.au/mt-langi-ghiran-langi-shiraz-2012/dp/2506>

**2012 Site Wines Bien Nacido Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Syrah** As usual, the USA made its mark with shiraz, and this Californian commanded attention. It has its share of oak, but the opulent fruit soaks it up with ease. Floral notes and very fine tannins add to the overall quality picture. (Not available) ★★★★★ 6

**2012 Cayuse Cailloux Vineyard Walla Walla Valley Syrah** We head north to Washington state, the home of this individual, attention-grabbing shiraz. The stone fruit perfume of viognier is on display in the fascinatingly complex aromatics. The palate is vibrant and long, wrapped in savoury tannins. (Not available) ★★★★★ 6

**2012 Dalwhinnie The Eagle Shiraz** This is a big shiraz from the Victorian Pyrenees, but it doesn't lack elegance. The nose is fascinating – ripe yet spicy, and there's even the faintest hint of green peppercorn. The palate is beautifully framed – supple yet tight and very long. (\$180.00) ★★★★★ 5  
<https://winehouse.com.au/dalwhinnie-eagle-shiraz-2012>

**2013 Penfolds RWT Shiraz** Although this wine is built for the long haul, it shows enough form now. The oak is obvious, but it sits well with the opulent fruit. It may not show the finesse of some of the other wines right now, but it will in a decade or two. (\$145.00) ★★★★★ 3  
<http://www.eastendcellars.com.au/category-list/red-wine/penfolds-rwt-shiraz-2013.html>

**2011 Cornas (Domaine A.Clape)** “Has to be Clape Cornas” wrote Tim Kirk in his notes. He went on to use the descriptors “complex” and “alluring”. It’s certainly floral and green-peppery, even hinting at green Tabasco. The palate is truly elegant, offering great length of flavour in a medium-bodied style. (\$185.00) ★★★★★ 3  
<http://www.veno.com.au/catalogsearch/result/?q=Clape>

**2012 Hermitage (Jean-Louis Chave)** Here we have controversy central. No wine split the panel into lovers and haters like this one. The Chairman believed this should have been the top wine. Other judges, however, believe they detected some Brettanomyces character, although two panel members whom we regard as “Brett police” gave it top points. To the fans among the judges it’s a multi-faceted, whole-bunch gem. We again turn to Tim Kirk whose notes sum it up. “Beauty and power. A wine of real authority.” (\$399.00) ★★★★★ 6  
<http://www.mwwines.com.au/museum-wine-shop/wines/wine-item/Domaine-Jean-Louis-Chave/Hermitage-Rouge/Red-Rhone/2012/02487046500201200001>

**2011 Alban Vineyards Patrino Alban Estate Edna Valley Syrah** This wine from California has a certain prettiness, lavishing floral and spice notes upon the taster, but it’s quite oaky. That’s a pity because the varietal flavour isn’t quite intense enough to fully support the barrel component. (Not available) ★★★★★ 4

**2013 Amayna Boya Syrah** Hailing from the San Antonio Valley near the coast, west of Santiago, Chile, this wine shows the confection-vegetal aroma common in reds from neighbouring Maipo. Nevertheless, the palate is soft and generous, with a lingering finish. (\$31.00) ★★★★★ 2

**2011 Viña Quintay Casablanca Valley Syrah** Another Chilean, this time from north of the San Antonio Valley, near Valparaiso. There’s no shortage of fruit aromas – blackcurrant and baked raspberry this time. It’s a little simple, but certainly delivers flavour. (\$57.00) ★★★★★ 3

**2012 Penfolds St Henri Shiraz** This top-notch red undoubtedly suffered from comparisons with the high-toned, aromatic cool region styles, but it makes a strong statement through perfectly ripe blackberry aromas and flavours. The palate is impressively long and the tannins are firm but fine. Cellar. (\$85.00) ★★★★★ 2

**2011 Mount Pleasant Mountain A Hunter Valley Shiraz** A bright, stylish, delicate shiraz with a touch of spice. It may not have the sheer power of some of the other wines, but it has class – and the capacity to age. (Not available) ★★★★★ 1

**2011 Craggy Range Le Sol Gimblett Gravels Syrah** There’s a hint of white pepper in this Hawkes Bay (NZ) red, but the flavour is ripe. However the oak tends to dominate. (\$115.00) ★★★★★ 1

**2012 Syrahmi Dreams Syrah** This Heathcote wine is a little too developed, but it does show attractive pipe tobacco, spice and dried herb (whole bunch) overtones. The flavour fades to a comparatively light finish. (\$54.00) ★★★★★ 1

**2011 Côte Rôtie La Mouline (E.Guigal)** I'm sure many will express surprise at the lowly station of this world-famous wine. The reason? Oak, oak and more oak. Apologists will chant "just give it time", but we doubt that time will heal the wounds inflicted by 42 months in new barriques. La Mouline is yet another sacred cow that is seldom tasted blind in circumstances such as these. The colour leaves something to be desired, and although the flavour tries valiantly to shoulder the oak, there's also a strong suspicion of medicinal Brettanomyces, two gold medals notwithstanding. (\$689.00) ★★★ 2

**2011 Castell d'Encus Thalarn Catalan Pyrenees Syrah** From the north-east of Spain, this wine was an experimental inclusion. Experiment failed. It's been hammered by horsey Brettanomyces, but the fruit still manages to hold its hand up. (\$130.00) ★ 0

The International Tasting began as an interesting diversion for our Small Vigneron Awards judges. It now has a life of its own, and is a strong drawcard when it comes to enticing people into giving us a few days of their time to judge.

As a result we always have strong judging panels, but that doesn't mean there's universal agreement. Many who are quick to point out inconsistencies in scoring from show to show and tasting to tasting, fail to grasp the significance of that difference of opinion. It's not simply a preference for one style over another. Quite obviously there was no unanimity over the presence or otherwise of Brettanomyces in some cases. In others, obvious oak was tolerated by some but not others. Even professional tasters have differing thresholds for certain wine faults, and those thresholds may vary depending on environment, the line-up of wines being tasted, and just how they are feeling at the time. Wine tasting is far from an exact science, but we're always prepared to express our opinion without fear or favour.

## Judges

**Bryan Currie** General Manager & winemaker Hungerford Hill

**Andrew Guard** Andrew Guard Imports

**Lex Howard** Winewise

**Lester Jesberg** Winewise

**Simon Killeen** Simão & Co

**Tim Kirk** Clonakilla

**Helen McCarthy** Mountadam Wines

**Alex McKay** Collector Wines

**Ian McKenzie** Consulting oenologist

**Nick O'Leary** Nick O'Leary Wines

**Dean O'Reilly** Moët-Hennessy

**Deb Pearce** The Real Review

**David Yeates** Winewise