

# YALUMBA

## A new name from a great wine firm

**L**ike a gnarled vine that has stood the test of time, Yalumba's roots run deeply into Australian wine history. In 1847 a brewer from Dorset in England, Samuel Smith, sailed from England to Australia, with his wife and five children, on the passenger vessel "China".

After initially squatting just north-east of the city of Adelaide at Klemzig, Samuel moved the family to the Barossa Valley where he worked for George Fife Angas. In 1849 he began planting a vineyard at Angaston on land purchased from Angas, and so the Yalumba story commenced.

Three years later, gold was discovered in Victoria and Samuel couldn't resist trying his hand. This interesting chapter in Samuel's life is charmingly described by André Simon in "The Wines, Vineyards and Vignerons of Australia", published in 1966.

*In 1852 "gold fever" hit the Colony, and Samuel Smith joined the rush to the neighbouring colony of Victoria, leaving his wife to look after the children and the vineyard. It took him five weeks to reach Bendigo, in central Victoria, with two companions and a six-oxen team: they travelled for most of the way along the Murray River, where they were able to find fish and game for food.*

*Samuel Smith did not make a fortune when he reached the gold-fields, but after he had sunk sixteen shafts without success, on the seventeenth attempt – to use his own words - "the Lord prospered my labours". Four months later he returned to Adelaide, where he sold his gold for £300, which gave him a chance to buy another eighty acres, a plough, two horses and a harness.*

*During her husband's absence, Mrs. Samuel Smith, who was surely worth more than all the gold in Bendigo, had taken care of the five children – one boy and four girls – as well as of the vineyard.*

One hundred and seventy years after Samuel Smith left the London docks, I partook of two days of tastings at Yalumba's home base at Angaston. The key buildings on the Yalumba Estate are "living" monuments to the ancestors of Robert Hill-Smith, self-described "Wine Boss" of the oldest family-owned wine company in Australia.

It's easy to almost drown in history when strolling the grounds of Yalumba, but history is something to learn from and appreciate, not to dwell upon. Although the past was ever-present in the tastings, the focus was much more on the present – and the future.



*Yalumba clock tower*

This visit to Yalumba was all about red wine, one in particular, which we'll work our way up to. In the lead-up to the grand finale, I tasted some of the distinguished reds in the portfolio, as well as a few exceptional old wines, including the marvellous 1939 Special Claret, but I'll confine my comments to more recent releases.



## CABERNET SAUVIGNON

**2006 Yalumba The Menzies Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon** The nose is unmistakably that of cabernet sauvignon, showing strong blackcurrant and mulberry aromas with underlying leafiness. The oak input is appropriate, imparting a whiff of vanilla. A substantial wine that is still very fresh, needing further time. Auctions will be your best hope of finding some. ★★★★★

*Fifty-four per cent of this wine spent 21 months in new French (37%) and American (17%) hogsheads. The rest aged in older French hogsheads and barriques.*

**2012 Yalumba The Menzies Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon**

Again that mulberry character shows, along with some cassis and a faint touch of leaf. The palate is intense and fresh, with prominent but fine tannins. This is a good cellaring prospect. (\$50.00) ★★★★★

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

*Eighteen months in new French (16%) hogsheads and barriques and American (3%) hogsheads. The rest aged in older French and American hogsheads and barriques.*

## SHIRAZ

**2015 Yalumba Paradox Shiraz** An intense blackberry-scented shiraz with a heady perfume suggesting violets. It's a long-flavoured, beautifully structured wine, with fine, savoury tannins. My pick of the young reds. (Not yet released. The 2014 is \$43.00) ★★★★★

*New (11%) and old French oak puncheons.*

**2012 Yalumba The Octavius Shiraz** A very appealing varietal expression - red fruits, mushroom and a dash of oak. It's quite fine and relatively understated. A great example of how Octavius has positively evolved over nearly three decades. (\$100.00) ★★★★★

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

*Sixty-four per cent Eden Valley, 36% Barossa Valley. Forty per cent new French and American octaves. The rest in older French barriques and hogsheads.*

**2015 Yalumba The Octavius Shiraz** Fresh red berry - even a spicy note - as well as a hint of spearmint. An exceptional Barossa red that I look forward to tasting after it's bottled. (To be bottled as is in 3-5 weeks and released in about three years.)

*Sixty-two per cent Eden Valley, 38% Barossa Valley. Forty per cent new French and American octaves. The rest in older French barriques and hogsheads.*

## CABERNET SHIRAZ

**2006 Yalumba The Signature - Kevin Renshaw & Ralph Dunning** Fresh and perfumed, with delightful cassis notes. An excellent package which is intense bright, firm and balanced. ★★★★★

*Sixty-nine per cent Barossa Valley cabernet sauvignon, 31% Barossa Valley shiraz.*

**2012 Yalumba The Signature - Robert Hill-Smith** Concentrated mulberries and blackcurrant with spicy and leafy notes. A beautifully polished wine offering vibrant fruit. It's for the long haul, but offers much now. (\$48.00) ★★★★★

<https://www.danmurphys.com.au/>

*Fifty-two per cent cabernet sauvignon (mostly Eden Valley), 48% Barossa shiraz.*

**And now a little more history .....**

At 29 years of age Fred Caley Smith, grandson of Yalumba's founder Samuel Smith, left the small village of Angaston in March 1893 and set out on an international journey, that, by any standards, was epic. He travelled around the globe via such places as the USA, England, Portugal, France, Italy, Egypt, India and Sri Lanka, returning to Angaston nearly two years after his departure.

Fred was a horticulturist, specialising in fruit trees. Although Yalumba was involved in wine making and distilling, a substantial part of its business at the time was fruit growing, canning and preserving.

Fred's odyssey was one of fact-finding, and he returned with all manner of botanic specimens which were put to use in the family business. It was also a sales trip, developing Yalumba's export network.



***Fred Caley Smith***

As Yalumba's information brief put it:

*Fred Caley Smith didn't just return with a kit bag of horticultural specimens. He brought back to the tiny village of Angaston with its population of 200 people – and to Yalumba – a worldliness that would shrink the globe for those who would come after him.*

But what is Fred Caley Smith's connection with this dissertation?

Yalumba, with its historical significance and physical location in the heartland of Australian red wine, needed a brand leader that would achieve such a status that it would stand alongside Grange and Hill of Grace. It was fitting that Yalumba at least attempted to take such a bold and significant step. It wouldn't be an easy one.

To make such a lofty ambition a reality required both the boldness and flair shown by Fred Caley Smith in 1893-94. The creation of a momentous wine was an expedition of sorts, but through vineyards and barrels, rather than countries, involving countless hours of sensory evaluation and discussion.

The exceptional vintage of 2012 provided an opportunity which the Yalumba team seized, and the first vintage of The Caley came to be.

Australia's wine history is dotted with fabulous red wines that are blends of cabernet sauvignon and shiraz from two regions. The Mildara Bin Series, Penfolds Bin 60A and Penfolds Bin 7 are but three examples. All combine the elegance of Coonawarra cabernet sauvignon with the richness of shiraz from warmer regions, and as The Caley took shape in the blending room, it became apparent that the Yalumba wine making crew was being led down an historic Australian path.

The first vintage of The Caley consists of 52% Coonawarra cabernet sauvignon, 27% Barossa Valley cabernet sauvignon and 21% Barossa Valley shiraz. It was matured in French barriques (27% new) that were predominantly assembled in the Yalumba cooperage. The rest of the barrels were 1, 2 and 3 years old. The Coonawarra component was drawn from Menzies Estate and the Barossa contributed from the Horseshoe Vineyard at Angaston (planted 1971) and the Burgemeister Linke Block (planted 1901) between Nuriootpa and Angaston.

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**2012 Yalumba The Caley** Bright crimson colour. The bouquet is a glorious, vibrant combination of cassis, red fruits and mulberry. This wine is opulence itself without the curses of over-ripeness or overt oak, and the tannins are supremely fine. The Caley would provide great pleasure now if served with rib of prime beef, but it will certainly outlive me and, dare I say, probably all those involved in its creation. This first vintage of The Caley will claim a place as one of Australia's great wines and will be, I hope, the foundation of a line of that will capture attention world-wide. (\$349.00) To be released shortly. ★★★★★

Lester Jesberg

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