

WONDERFUL & WEIRD

Two reds dominated all others in tastings last week. One is an utterly brilliant shiraz; the other a truly impressive cabernet blend. The keys to both wines are balance, intensity and regional expression. All too often, we encounter Australian red wines that are big on flavour but small on that essential quality – finesse. Both of these wines have that f word in spades.



2012 Bests Bin No. 0 Great Western Shiraz This is, quite simply, an elite wine. Blackberry, spices, licorice, rose petal and all manner of other nuances make up a stunning nose, and the palate is satisfying, supple and very long. Although it can be enjoyed now, this wine will take the decades in its stride. (\$69.95) ★★★★★

<https://theredwineshop.com.au/collections/red-wine/products/bests-great-western-bin-0-shiraz-2012-750ml-grampians>

2014 Grosset Gaia Clare Valley (Cabernet Sauvignon Cabernet Franc) I can't recall a young Clare cabernet as polished as this one. The better Clares (Grosset excepted) of the past certainly haven't lacked flavour, but were more in the solid, reliable workhorse line than a Winx or a Black Caviar. This one is a thoroughbred through and through, bursting with blackcurrant vibrancy, backed up by the faintest hint of mint. The palate finishes long, with fine, lingering tannins. Cellar.

(\$82.00) ★★★★★

<https://www.winesquare.com.au/2014-grosset-gaia-cabernet-merlot-adelaide-hills.html>

The bitter end

So much for the wonderful. Now the weird. “Weird” isn’t really the appropriate adjective, but it fits so well with “wonderful” that I couldn’t resist it. “Different” would be closer to the mark.

When I first saw the label of Bryan Martin’s **Outlandish Claims Bitter Tonic** I was reminded of old black and white movies in which flim-flam men hawked “medicinal” compounds to gullible yokels. My dear old grandfather often uttered a mantra about such beverages which went something like “Cures coughs and colds and sore ...” Wait. I think we’ll leave it there. Grandad possessed a very colourful turn of phrase.

Bryan Martin is proprietor and winemaker of Ravensworth Wines at Murrumbateman, and is quite inclined to undertake “special projects”, hence the brilliantly-packaged Outlandish Claims Bitter Tonic which comes in both white and red varieties.

I’m not suggesting everyone will love Bryan’s tonics. My wife Adrienne detests both of them. But then, her sometimes questionable taste means she also abhors Campari and gin & tonic. Do you get my drift? After all, it is a bitter tonic, and if you don’t enjoy bitter things, you’ll be in Adrienne’s camp.

Apart from Campari, think Fernet-Branca or Jägermeister and you’ll start to form a mental picture. The white version is a pale orange colour and has a classic Italianate bitter herb aroma, with hints of dried orange peel, while the palate starts slightly sweetly, but departs with a decidedly bitter finish.

The grenache-based red version shares the bouquet of dried herbs on the nose, but the flavour is clearly red wine-based, with citrus nuances. Again, we’re talking bitter-sweet. Categorising these fascinating drinks is not easy. I guess they edge into the vermouth category – but don’t expect them to taste like Cinzano or Martini & Rossi.

I appreciate both the white and red as apéritifs, and find they do the job of stimulating my appetite very well. Serve chilled or over ice. I haven’t yet used them to make seriously bitter Negronis, but I’m sure the results would be excellent. Both \$45.00. Both ★★★★★

<http://www.ravensworthwines.com.au/order/outlandish-claims>

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