



WINEWISE

THE CONSUMER'S WINE GUIDE

September 2013



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2013 HUNTER SEMILLON

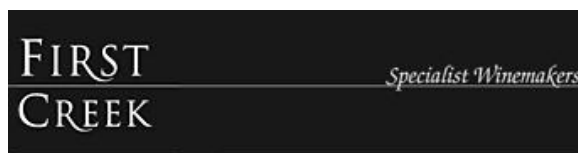
Here's our annual report of the most recent Hunter Valley Semillon vintage. We thank the Hunter Valley vignerons for their strong support of this feature. As you can see this is, and always has been, a warts and all exercise and not a publicity exercise.

The wines were numbered and poured by one of our stewards Bob Judd and tasted "blind" by Lex Howard, Lester Jesberg, Deb Pearce, Nick Spencer and Hamish Young. Nick and Hamish are the winemakers at Eden Road.

Excellent value wines in purple.

Outstanding

2013 First Creek Premium Semillon This semillon is a little more open than some, but it's super-impressive, showing straw, chalk and lime characteristics. The palate is juicy and racy, offering citrus-lime flavours. Enjoy it to the max over the next 3-5 years. (\$22.00)



2013 First Creek Winemaker's Reserve Semillon Again there are those classic chalky lime aromas, and there's plenty of punch for the taste-buds. Long and deliciously lip-smacking. Cellaring will definitely be rewarded. (\$40.00)

2013 Andrew Thomas Braemore Semillon The familiar limey notes of the Braemore vineyard show on the nose, and the palate seamlessly merges fruit and acidity. Although there's plenty of acid, there's also a suppleness to the palate that suggests this wine will be looking great in about five years. (\$30.00)

2013 Briar Ridge Stockhausen Semillon This is a richly flavoured, strongly varietal semillon with no lack of citrus-like flavour. It's enjoyable now, but 2-3 years in bottle should bring to a peak. Strongly supported for its drinkability. (\$26.00)

2013 Leogate Estate Creek Bed Semillon The classic lemon-lime aromas and flavours abound here. Intensity and acidity are major features of an impressive palate. Give it about five years in the cellar. (\$30.00)

Highly Recommended

2013 Ridge View Generations Semillon This is a delicate but long-flavoured semillon with appealingly racy acidity. While there's definite cellaring potential, it's a great partner for oysters right now. (\$25.00)

2013 Brokenwood Stanleigh Park Vineyard Reserve

Semillon If you're looking for a classic backward semillon to age, this would be it. Due for release years into the future, it will still be a great cellaring proposition even then. Definitely a wine for the semillon purist. (Not yet released)

2013 McLeish Estate Hunter Valley Semillon Shows intense citrus flavour on a comparatively rounded palate, with good supporting acidity. Ticks all the boxes, but doesn't look like one for the long haul. (\$20.00)

2013 McGuigan Bin 9000 Hunter Valley Semillon A very restrained young semillon showing quite a bit of sulphur dioxide. However, it has everything required for long term cellaring, and will be the bargain of the tasting. (Not yet released, but usually sells in the \$12.00-\$15.00 range.)

2013 Pepper Tree Alluvius Semillon Very well defined varietal fruit, if ever so slightly forward. The palate is long and taut, with minimal firmness providing texture. (\$35.00)

2013 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Hunter Semillon Attractive lemon-lime through the SO₂. It's a powerful, long, racy semillon that begs for cellaring. Will be one of the best of the vintage in five years' time. (\$40.00)

2013 Hart & Hunter The Remparts Semillon Restrained varietal with obvious SO₂. Zippy, refreshing acidity is a feature of the classic palate. (\$30.00)

2013 Andrew Thomas The O.C. Semillon An intense limey-citrus style that is a lovely rich mouthful. Short term. (\$23.00)

2013 Midnight's Promise Semillon Has an interesting quincy/stone fruit nose and an intense palate with good fruit carry and acidity. (\$19.00)

2013 Two Rivers Stones Throw Semillon Although it's a little more advanced than some, there's good varietal fruit to be enjoyed, backed by appropriate acidity. (Not yet released but expected to be around \$14.00)

2013 Brokenwood Howard Vineyard Reserve Semillon SO₂ partially masks the varietal fruit on the nose. However the palate is much better – very linear and steely. (Not yet released)

2013 Briar Ridge Dairy Hill Semillon There's a faintly green edge to the nose, but the palate delivers persistence, restraint and balance. Needs time. (\$32.00)

2013 Pepper Tree Limited Release Tallawanta Semillon This is a vibrant yet restrained young white with hints of lime. It's a racy, linear semillon that will reward cellaring. (\$28.00)

2013 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Comparatively rich, showing hints of stone fruit, but there's excellent acidity. Should be looking good in 5-6 years. (\$38.00)

Recommended

2013 Brokenwood Drayton's Vineyard Reserve Semillon

Attractive limey nose. Palate has weight and zip, but needs time to open up. (Not yet released)

2013 De Iuliis Aged Release Semillon Plenty of SO₂.

Restrained fruit under. Classic backward palate with a faintly green edge. (Release 2019)

2013 Tyrrell's Brookdale Semillon Colour slightly advanced.

Typically soapy semillon nose. Ready. Slightly firm. (\$20.00)

2013 Pokolbin Estate Phil Swannell Semillon Rich lemony

varietal nose and palate. Drinking well now. (\$25.00)

2013 Saddler's Creek Classic Hunter Semillon A lean, fresh

style closed by SO₂. Needs time. (\$26.00)

2013 De Iuliis Hunter Valley Semillon Quite full and forward,

but strongly varietal. Fruit-acid not seamless. (\$18.00)

2013 Brokenwood Oakey Creek Vineyard Reserve Semillon

Citrus under SO₂. Fairly closed and hard at the moment, but has potential. (Not yet released)

2013 Hart & Hunter Oakey Creek Semillon Closed, showing

plenty of SO₂. Demands time in bottle. (\$30.00)

2013 Andrew Thomas Six Degrees Semillon Rich lemony fruit

which is very fresh. Some SO₂ showing. Nice fresh off-dry style. (\$23.00)

2013 Silkman Semillon A fresh, low-key semillon with plenty of

SO₂. The palate comes good with lively, lemony fruit. (\$25.00)

Agreeable

2013 Tempus Two Pewter Series Semillon Slightly dulled by SO₂. The palate has initial weight, but finishes slightly short.

2013 Pepper Tree Limited Release Semillon The nose shows

fresh, restrained lime and SO₂, but there's a slight broadness to the palate. (\$22.00)

2013 Tulloch Vineyard Selection Semillon SO₂ covers

restrained fruit. Definitely needs time. (\$18.00)

2013 Tyrrell's HVD Semillon Comparatively deep colour. Nose

shows a lot of SO₂. (Release 2017)

2013 Audrey Wilkinson Winemakers Selection Semillon

Varietal but slightly dull. Just-adequate drink now. (Not yet released)

2013 Cockfighter's Ghost Hunter Valley Semillon Advanced

but still has some fruit and freshness. (Not yet released)

2013 Ernest Hill Cyril Semillon Beginnings of broadness.

Comparatively advanced. Lacks acid drive. (\$25.00)

2013 De Iuliis Aged Sunshine Vineyard Semillon Slightly dull nose. The palate offers varietal flavour but tapers off. (\$25.00)

Acceptable

2013 Tintilla Angus Semillon Full lemony nose. Broad palate. (Not yet released)

2013 David Hook Old Vines Pothana Vineyard Belford Semillon Slightly advanced dry hay nose. Tends broad, but has good acidity. (\$25.00)

2013 Gundog Estate Poacher's Semillon Dull nose. A bit broad but has plenty of flavour and acid. (\$30.00)

2013 Brokenwood Hunter Valley Semillon A little peachy and forward. Broad palate. (\$25.00)

2013 Tyrrell's Belford Semillon Quite dull. Surprising lack of vibrancy. (\$23.00)

2013 Margan Hunter Valley Semillon Advanced colour. Big wet straw nose. Slightly sweet. Too developed. (\$17.00)

2013 Domaine de Binet Semillon Forward and peachy. Slightly dilute. (\$25.00)

2013 Allandale Hunter Semillon Quite forward and peachy. Tending broad. (\$19.00)

2013 Audrey Wilkinson The Ridge Semillon Forward. Obvious SO₂. Disjointed palate. Brown apple oxidised characteristics. (Not yet released)

2013 Hungerford Hill Collection Hunter Semillon Shows sulphides, and is short on the palate, with a hard finish. (\$40.00)

2013 Tulloch Julia Semillon Almost covered by SO₂. Stripped of flavour. (\$30.00)

2013 Ballabourneen Majors Lane Semillon Developed colour. Silage sauvignon blanc-like nose. Green finish. (\$28.00)

2013 Tinklers School Block Semillon Marzipan/nougat characteristics together with a lot of SO₂. (Not yet released)

2013 Audrey Wilkinson Hunter Semillon Slightly dull nose. Shows some volatile acidity. (Not yet released)

2013 Hungerford Hill Hunter Valley Semillon Dull. Marzipan edge. Hard finish. (\$25.00)

Unacceptable

2013 Oakvale Limited Release Reserve Semillon Dull. Oxidised. This wine was the only one sealed with (Diam) cork. We opened a second bottle which was the same as the first. Whether the closure is at least partially to blame, we can't say. (Not yet released)

Vintage 2013 for semillon in the Hunter is clearly a success. It's produced a lot of "all rounder" wines that can be consumed young, but will reward short-medium term cellaring. But there are some giants waiting in the wings – Brokenwood Stanleigh Park and Tyrrell's Vat 1 among them. They will achieve legendary status in a decade's time.

And by the way

I've occasionally noted a few comments about the inconsistency of wine show judging e.g. a wine may be awarded a medal in one show and nothing in another. If the complainants knew much about the judging process, or indeed, people, they wouldn't expect wine judging to be such a mechanical process.

This judging, following closely after the Hunter Valley Wine Show (HVWS) and the Winewise Small Vigneron Awards (SVA) prompted me to make some comparisons after our scores were finalised. The panel for this tasting numbered five, and in the other two shows, panels of three did the assessments, making the comparative exercise less than straightforward, but I think I've gone close enough.

Differences in scoring are unavoidable. Why? Different people, different places, different line-ups of wines, different time. In the case of very young whites like these 2013 semillons, very recent bottling is a factor, and perceptions of free sulphur dioxide can vary significantly over the first few months in bottle. What's more, different judges react differently to sulphur dioxide, and that leads to interesting discussions and variations in scores.

People, especially critics of the show system who have never participated in wine shows, fail to understand how much discussion takes place after the scores are called. One persuasive judge can, at times, significantly influence the final outcome, convincing the other two to follow him or her. The same scenario can be repeated in the next show, with another dominant judge and a different outcome.

Above all, judging wine isn't like judging cola soft drinks. The many complexities of wine evoke emotions, and that's where the discussions of wine show panels are vitally important. How much "funk" is too much in any given chardonnay? How much oak is appropriate? What about the level of whole-bunch character in pinot noir and shiraz? Opinions will vary – and so they should. Wine is a substance where there can be more than one correct answer, and that reflects the views of consumers. Serious faults are normally dealt with on a uniform basis from panel to panel – as they should be.

The grippers apparently put wine in the same category as cola when it comes to assessment. Maybe those passionless souls would be more happy with tabulated readings from a gas chromatographer – but even they could vary, especially if corks are involved.

Here's a comparison of all the wines that were judged in this tasting, the Hunter Valley Wine Show and the Winewise Small Vigneron Awards.

	Winewise	Hunter	SVA
THOMAS BRAEMORE	Gold	Gold	Gold
LEOGATE CREEK BED Bronze	Gold	Bronze	
RIDGEVIEW GENERATIONS Silver	Gold	Silver	
THOMAS THE O.C. Bronze	Silver	No medal	
BRIAR RIDGE DAIRY HILL Silver	Silver	Gold	
DE IULIIS AGED RELEASE	Silver	Bronze	Gold
DE IULIIS Bronze	Bronze	Bronze	
ERNEST HILL CYRIL medal	No medal	No medal	No
TINTILLA ANGUS Silver	No medal	No medal	
GUNDOG ESTATE medal	No medal	Silver	No

The First Creek Premium Semillon was awarded a bronze medal at the HVWS and the First Creek Winemaker's Reserve scored a silver.

Lester Jesberg

2012 COLDSTREAM HILLS

Coldstream Hills is, in our view, one of a handful of genuine Australian “five star” wineries. The chief winemaker Andrew Fleming would be the last one to blow his own trumpet, but, working with fellow winemaker Greg Jarratt and a top-notch viticultural team, he produces some of the Yarra’s (and Australia’s) best wines.

The latest batch of releases includes some stunning examples of chardonnay and pinot noir.



Coldstream Hills

Chardonnay

2012 Coldstream Hills Yarra Valley Chardonnay This is a very attractive young wine that shows white peach and nuts aromas. The palate is silky and seamless, but just tapers off slightly on the finish. (\$25.00) ***Recommended***

2012 Coldstream Hills Deer Farm Chardonnay The essence of restraint. The aromas tend to citrus and quince in this very textural chardonnay. There’s just the right amount of grip and acidity, and the finish is long. (\$42.00) ***Highly Recommended***

2012 Coldstream Hills Rising Vineyard Chardonnay This is a chardonnay of substance. White peach, toasted nuts and butter show on the nose, and the palate is long, creamy and very well balanced. (\$42.00) ***Highly Recommended***

Note: Made from fruit grown in the Rising Vineyard at St Andrews on the western side of the Yarra Valley.

2012 Coldstream Hills Reserve Chardonnay What a formidable chardonnay this is. It's complex, but doesn't draw heavily on sulphidic funk. There's a whiff of SO₂ at this early stage, but it's the input of lees and superb French oak that gives this wine its multi-faceted presence. The rich, intense palate features perfect integration of all components, and the balance is perfect. This vintage is possibly the best of an illustrious line. (\$53.00) **Outstanding**

Pinot Noir

2012 Coldstream Hills Yarra Valley Pinot Noir Shows rich dark berry aromas augmented by a hint of mocha oak. The palate is silky, well balanced fresh and satisfying. Perfect for short-term enjoyment. (\$27.00) **Highly Recommended**

2012 Coldstream Hills Deer Farm Pinot Noir Pale but bright colour with tinges of purple. There's an attractive strawberry perfume with briary hints, and the palate is very fine, but long. The acidity is a little prominent on the finish. (\$47.00) **Highly Recommended**

Note: Made from fruit grown at the top of the very steep E Block of Deer Farm vineyard at Gladysdale in the Upper Yarra Valley.

2012 Coldstream Hills The Esplanade Pinot Noir A powerful but fragrant pinot with spicy nuances. The palate has real poise, with super-fine, persistent tannins and great length of varietal flavour. (\$47.00) **Outstanding**

Note: A single clone (MV6) pinot noir made from fruit grown in the Syme vineyard at Seville.

2012 Coldstream Hills Reserve Pinot Noir Now we enter complex and fascinating territory. There's an edginess to the red berry and plum nose which also show hints of ground coffee. It's firm and slightly reserved on the palate, emphasising its fine, firm structure, but the quality and intensity of fruit is undeniable. Drink the other wines in the range short-term, but keep this one for at least five years. If you think it's expensive, think good premier cru Côte de Nuits, and you'll see it's a bargain. (\$75.00) **Outstanding**

Note: The heart and soul of this wine is the home vineyard at Coldstream.

Suffice to say, you'll be missing a lot if you don't try at least a few of the 2012 Coldstream Hills wines. For the true enthusiast, it's not just a matter of quality. Here you have the chance to compare the characteristics of different sites in a region where producers are now coming to grips with its incredible diversity.

Lester Jesberg

Screwcap variation?

We damned the 2011 Cullen Kevin John Chardonnay with faint praise in an earlier bulletin. Our major negative point was advanced colour and flavour. Two people for whom I have considerable respect, winemaker Vanya Cullen and journalist Huon Hooke, contacted me and expressed surprise at our review. Vanya kindly sent another bottle which we included in another chardonnay line-up with a similar result. The colour of the wine was comparatively deep, and the nose and palate were more developed than other wines of the same age. That was it – or so I thought.

Shortly after, a friend produced a bottle of 2011 Kevin John over lunch, and immediately captured my attention. When poured, the colour of the wine amazed me. It was quite pale, and the nose was restrained, as was the palate. This was no illusion or “drinking the label”. What’s the explanation? I don’t know. It’s difficult to believe that both bottles sent by Vanya were similarly affected by heat in transit, but I have no other theory. I’d be interested to hear of any readers’ experiences with the wine.

Lester Jesberg

OUR RATING SCALE

Outstanding Exceptional by any standard – a world-class wine.

Highly Recommended A very fine wine which is a faultless example of the style.

Recommended Has no faults and offers most enjoyable drinking.

Agreeable Lacks intensity or may have minor blemishes, but is still a pleasant drink

Acceptable Decidedly run of the mill, and/or obviously deficient in some way or other

Unacceptable A wine that, in our view, provides no drinking pleasure.

2013 Canberra International Riesling Challenge

The Canberra International Riesling Challenge has grown into a significant wine show which honours one of the world's great grape varieties. Here are the major results.

Best Wine of the 2013 Challenge

2011 Stiftung Schützenhaus Trockenbeerenauslese (Weingut Georg Müller)

Best Australian Riesling

2013 Pikes Traditionale Clare Valley Riesling

Best Dry Riesling

2012 Hunter's Marlborough Riesling

Best Sweet Riesling

2011 Stiftung Schützenhaus Trockenbeerenauslese (Weingut Georg Müller)

Best Australian Museum Class

2008 d'Arenberg The Dry Dam Riesling

Best American Riesling

2013 Sheldrake Point Late Harvest Riesling

Best from the Canberra District

2013 Ravensworth Riesling

Best Riesling from Tasmania

2011 Frogmore Creek Botrytis Riesling



REPORT FROM BURGUNDY

Our week in Burgundy has confirmed the excellence of the 2010s. Both whites and reds are showing brilliant form, and even “pot luck” choices from minor players turned up trumps. Michel Caillot, from whom Adrienne and I import a significant amount, showed us a range of 2010 whites, from Bourgogne up, that are very exciting. They’ve only just been bottled, and will reach Australia next autumn. If you haven’t already done so, splurge on the 2010s.

One 2010 red in particular displayed quality and finesse above its station. The 2010 Vosne-Romanée from Cécile Tremblay is the epitome of its village, home of the greatest pinot noirs on earth. It’s fragrant, long and fine – a sheer delight. Imported by <http://www.andrewguard.com.au/>



Bernard Noblet, winemaker at Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, pours a '96 La Tache for the editor.

A visit to Domaine de la Romanée-Conti is always something to treasure. We tasted the 2012s from barrel, and although they were in the throes of malolactic, the quality still shone through. Each site expressed itself clearly, and, as usual, the La Tache was impressively opulent and fragrant. The relative bargain is the Grands Echezeaux which will be a wine of considerable finesse.

Generalising about Burgundy, 2011 reds are patchy, although it looks like producers who maintained their vineyards well, and used sorting tables rigorously, have succeeded.

I suggest you buy only if you are very confident of your source, or have tasted the wine yourself. The best of the vintage are of very high standard.

Vintage 2010 in Chablis was very successful, but don't overlook the 2011s. We tasted several that were classically flinty and intense, and suggest you try as many examples as you can.

Visiting Burgundy

We've stayed in a variety of locations, usually in gîtes (<http://www.gites-de-france.fr>) for a week at a time. However, the small wine villages, while serene, lack facilities. Vosne-Romanée doesn't even have a baker. Beaune has it all, but is a bustling town full of tourists most of the year.



Grande Rue, Nuits-Saint-Georges

This time we rented a comfortable modern gîte in Nuits-Saint-Georges, right opposite Faiveley. Although we prefer Beaune for its commercial appeal, Nuits-Saint-Georges was an ideal base. It is well served with bakeries, patisseries, restaurants and charcuteries, and there is sufficient free parking.

Hotels we Recommend

Le Cep, 27 rue Mafoux, Beaune. <http://www.hotel-cep-beaune.com>

Hostellerie Le Cèdre, 12 boulevard Marechal Foch, Beaune.
<http://www.lecedre-beaune.com>

De La Poste, 5 boulevard Clemenceau, Beaune.
<http://www.hoteldelapostebeaune.com>

Restaurants

Loiseau des Vignes, 31 rue Mafoux, Beaune.
<http://www.bernard-loiseau.com>

Ma Cuisine, passage Ste-Hélène (off place Carnot), Beaune.
Bookings essential. Tel: 33 (0)3 8022 3022

Relais de la Diligence, 49 rue de la Gare, Meursault.
<http://www.relaisdeladiligence.com/>

We dine at the latter two establishments every time we visit Burgundy, and have enjoyed Relais de la Diligence about 20 times over the past 30 years.

Lester Jesberg

OTHER RED VARIETALS

Other Red Varietals may not have the cachet of pinot noir, cabernet sauvignon and shiraz, but the classes were packed full of interest.

Sadly the overall quality wasn't as good as we hoped for, but the top four wines, made from four different varieties, should encourage you to look further than the "big three" when it comes to purchasing red wine.

Note: **G**=Gold medal; **S**= Silver medal; **B**=Bronze medal

Excellent value wines in purple.

Outstanding

2011 Palmer Margaret River Malbec It's a pity that malbec is a much-neglected variety. Grown wisely and made well, it's definitely a stand-alone grape, and here we have proof of that. The ripe red berry fruit carries hints of tobacco, and the intense, perfectly balanced palate is a real winner. (\$27.50) **G**
<http://palmerwines.com.au/palmer-wines-dunsborough-range-vintage>

Highly Recommended

2012 Mandoon Estate Old Vine Grenache The classic "sweet" fruit of grenache is powerfully present in this delicious red, but it's kept in check by fine, firm, perfectly managed tannins. Marvellous short term drinking. (\$25.00) **G**
<http://www.mandoonestate.com.au/>

2012 Serafino Lagrein This is a very seductive, fragrant red which offers fresh varietal drinking. It's just a little light on the mid-palate, but that detracts little from its drink-now appeal. (\$18.00) **S**
<http://www.serafinowines.com.au/wine/buy-wine>

2012 Nannup Ridge Merlot Nannup Ridge has impressed us with merlot before, and this one is very fresh, with varietal plumminess. The tannins, although fine, are quite firm. (\$23.00) **S**

Recommended

2010 Ceravolo Petit Verdot There's plenty of dark berry fruit here in a rich, ripe, albeit simple, style. (\$20.00) **S**

2010 Palmer Margaret River Merlot Shows excellent varietal aroma and flavour, but is a bit too oaky for the fruit weight. (\$27.50) **S**

2011 Topper's Mountain Tempranillo A genuinely interesting red with attractive spicy, earthy overtones. However, it doesn't have sufficient intensity for a higher rating. (\$32.00) **B**

2010 Freeman Altura Vineyard Nebbiolo This is a good expression of nebbiolo that shows the classic rose petal nose, but doesn't have the fruit intensity to carry the tannins. (\$35.00) **B**

All other wine tasted – in order of preference

2012 Fifth Estate Wines Tempranillo **B**
2010 Cradle Of Hills Shiraz Mourvèdre **B**
2012 Juniper Crossing Tempranillo **B**
2012 Freeman Altura Vineyard Tempranillo **B**
2011 Palmer Margaret River Merlot **B**
2012 Dogrock Degraves Road Vineyard Grenache **B**
2009 Serafino Sangiovese **B**
2010 Topper's Mountain Barbera **B**
2011 Sanguine Estate Tempranillo **B**
2012 Hugh Hamilton The Ratbag Merlot **B**
2012 Harcourt Valley Vineyards Malbec **B**
2010 Topper's Mountain Nebbiolo
2012 Collector Rose Red City Sangiovese
2009 Pokolbin Estate Belebula Tempranillo
2009 The Hunter Vineyard Merlot
2011 Three Dark Horses McLaren Vale Grenache
2011 Dyson Sangiovese
2011 Higher Plane Merlot
2010 919 Durif
2010 Burge Family Winemakers Garnacha
2012 McLaren Vale III Associates Four Score Grenache
2012 Serafino Bellissimo Primitivo
2011 Juniper Crossing Merlot
2009 Lucas Estate Petit Verdot
2005 Pokolbin Estate Belebula Sangiovese
2011 Quealy Pyrenees Nebbiolo
2011 Cape Grace Cabernet Franc
2010 Grove Estate Sommita Nebbiolo
2011 John Gehrig Wines – John Ox Lagrein 2011
2012 Highbank Merlot
2010 Terra Felix Mouvèdre
2011 Battely Durif
2013 Lark Hill Biodynamic Sangiovese
2010 Trandari Nebbiolo
2010 Kies Family Monkey Nut Tree Merlot
2011 Ceravolo Red Earth Merlot
2011 Serafino Merlot
2012 201 Durif
2010 Battely Durif
2011 Cape Naturaliste Vineyard Torpedo Rocks Merlot
2010 Topper's Mountain Pinotage
2011 Silkwood Zinfandel
2010 919 Tempranillo
2012 Lanes End Cabernet Franc Merlot
2010 John Gehrig Wines Merlot 2010
2010 Topper's Mountain Tannat
2009 Red Art Tempranillo

NATURAL WINE

There are those who don't like airports or aircraft, but I do. Travelling solo affords me thinking time, and think I did after reading an article on "natural" wine in Canberra airport.

I'd been mulling over the subject for over a year, and the article flicked the switch that put my cogitation into top gear. I recalled a visit to a natural wine fair in Beaujolais last year at the invitation of Mathieu Lapierre. Adrienne and I import his wines, under the label of his late father, Marcel Lapierre, who seems to have been elevated to sainthood by the natural wine movement.

Mathieu served his un sulphured, biodynamic Morgon at the fair, and it was delicious. Sadly, it was one of the few wines I enjoyed. Mathieu's wine had been very recently bottled 10 km from the location of the fair, and had not suffered the rigours of shipping and dubious storage conditions.

When Marcel was in charge of the estate, he and I agreed that, before shipping to Australia, his wine must be sulphured. That is pure commonsense because, as soon as a bottle leaves the winery it is out of the producer's control and can easily be subjected to heat.

Un sulphured wine quickly deteriorates in such circumstances. Marcel was well aware of the danger, and he always inspected the storage conditions of restaurants before agreeing to sell them sulphur-free wine.

Back to the wine fair. I quickly grew tired of being offered young whites that looked and tasted like (cloudy) amontillado sherry, and reds that were homes to nasty beasties like Brettanomyces and Acetobacter. I find it difficult to believe that people drink these wines and pronounce them to be good.

My sense of smell kept warning me not to put these concoctions into my mouth, and when I did, one of them had an almost-emetic effect.



I had encountered similar wines before – when I judged an amateur winemakers’ show – but in such a forum dreadful faults can be attributed to gross ignorance of winemaking hygiene, and the wines are not for commercial sale.

My unfortunate experiences in Beaujolais caused me to think of the many dedicated and talented winemakers in Australia who practice environmentally-friendly viticulture and minimal intervention in the winery. They produce world-class wines that are expressive of their origins which aren’t obscured by wine faults, and are delicious to drink.

Members of the natural wine movement think that by doing nothing but fermenting grape juice they are expressing “terroir”. How can that be when oxidation, aldehydes and volatility almost completely erase the flavours of the grapes? Even the ancient Egyptians and Romans had some idea about preserving wine. Throwing out all the knowledge of winemaking acquired over the millennia is akin to society reverting to the conditions of the dark ages. Wine lovers don’t want all the progress made over the centuries tossed out the window.

If I ever wanted to drink the kind of wine being dished out by the naturalists, I’ll make it in my garage. At least it wouldn’t have to travel far – and neither would I.

Now, back to my QANTAS Club double-shot flat white while I calm down.

PS To all “sommeliers” who dish this rubbish up to clients with a smile, I suggest

1. You stop being so bloody cynical. or
2. You take steps to acquire some knowledge of wine.

Lester Jesberg

TELLURIAN

Tellurian winemaker Tobias Ansted attracted the attention of the wine media when he directed operations at Bendigo-based Balgownie. However, another career opportunity led him south-east to Heathcote.

Tobias is now well established at Tellurian Wines, and I managed to squeeze in a visit on my way to Tullamarine airport.

The first Tellurian vintage, 2008, was made at Balgownie, and the following three were processed in a rented facility at Taradale. A winery was constructed at Toolleen in time for the 2012 vintage, and that's where Tobias now calls home.

TELLURIAN TASTINGS

2011 Tellurian Heathcote Marsanne The nose is fresh and stone-fruity, and the palate delivers freshness and length, with an attractively chalky texture. *Highly Recommended*

Whole-bunch pressed; 50% fermented in tank, 50% in older oak; on lees until bottled.

<http://store.banksfinewine.com.au/tellurian-marsanne-2011/dp/1007> Note: only 2 bottles in stock

2012 Tellurian Heathcote Marsanne Rich, peachy aromas are matched by suggestions of toasty oak, and the palate is rich and ripe, leaning to tropical fruit in flavour. (\$27.00) *Recommended*

2010 Tellurian Heathcote Grenache Shiraz Mourvèdre (46%,34%,20%) This blend was matured in old oak, and it shows perfumed characteristics, with black truffle complex notes. The palate is long and fine, with a definite savoury feel. (\$34.00) *Highly Recommended*

2012 Tellurian Grenache Shiraz Mourvèdre The freshness of this wine shows clearly in the bright colour and vibrant aroma. The palate is long, packed with red fruits flavour, and perfectly balanced by fine, savoury tannins. A delightful wine. (Not yet released) *Outstanding*

2011 Tellurian Mourvèdre This wine is made from grapes grown in the Greenstone vineyard at Heathcote. It has the hints of graphite and earth which I find are typical of mourvèdre, and the palate is remarkably fine, the red berry fruit carrying through on a long finish. (\$34.00) *Highly Recommended*

2009 Tellurian Heathcote Pastiche Shiraz The red fruits characteristics are fresh and attractive, but the flavour is overwhelmed by puckering tannins. (\$NA) *Agreeable*
Note: The Pistache range is blended from a number of different sites in the Heathcote region.

2010 Tellurian Heathcote Pastiche Shiraz The intense dark berry aromas and flavours have attractive spicy/meaty overtones. Again there's plenty of tannin, but the balance is much better. (\$NA) *Recommended*

2011 Tellurian Heathcote Pastiche Shiraz There's a slightly gamey reductive component to the fresh intense fruit which gives the wine a Rhône character. The tannins are comparatively fine. (\$26.00) *Recommended*

2012 Tellurian Heathcote Pastiche Shiraz A rich, ripe shiraz that is packed with flavour. It's decidedly firm at the moment, but has the balance for cellaring. (Not yet released) *Recommended*

The Estate Shiraz Range

2008 Tellurian Heathcote Shiraz There's plenty of red and black berry flavour with some grilled beef notes. It's starting to show some maturity but is still rich and firm. (\$NA) *Recommended*

2009 Tellurian Heathcote Shiraz Here we have richness and freshness galore. It's a substantial wine, but it has very attractive savoury tannins. (\$NA) *Recommended*

2010 Tellurian Heathcote Tranter Shiraz The red berry fruit shines out of this wine, and it's greatly enhanced by a whiff of spice. Palate-wise, it's firm and fine, with excellent balance and length. First class. (\$39.00) *Outstanding*

2012 Tellurian Heathcote Tranter Shiraz This one is all perfumed dark berry and violets. There are hints of dark chocolate. The tannins are very fine on a super-impressive, long palate. (Not yet released) *Outstanding*

Without doubt, the Tellurian range offers some of Heathcote's finest whites and reds. The quality:price ratio is very good, and you really should try these wines.

Up-coming cellar door opening hours (11:00 am – 4:00 pm).

October

Saturday 19 & Sunday 20

November

Saturday 16 & Sunday 17

December

Saturday 14 & Sunday 15

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

Lester Jesberg