

ROYAL HOBART WINE SHOW

Well run and well judged wine shows offer a lot to both producer and consumer. The producer receives feedback from panels of judges drawn from a variety of fields including winemaking, journalism and hospitality. The consumer can skim the cream of the gold medal wines, all of which excelled in the cold light of the tasting bench. Most wine drinkers know of wine shows, but not many realise how they operate?

The wines are judged “blind” in classes based mainly on grape variety and vintage. In large shows like Hobart (about 1,600 entries), the judges operate under the direction of the Chair of Judges, and in Hobart that was Yalumba’s chief winemaker Louisa Rose. Each of five panels of three judges was controlled by a panel chair, of which I was one. An associate (or trainee) judge was assigned to each panel, and although the associates’ scores were not counted in the final assessment, they were encouraged to participate in deliberations as much as possible.

All judges and associates tasted and scored each wine out of 20 (18.5 = gold medal, 17.0 = silver, 15.5 = bronze) before retiring to a separate area to call the scores. Every judge writes down the others’ scores, and the panel chair moderates the discussion that takes place. Every wine receiving at least one 18.5 score is brought back for further assessment.

Note: If the 100 point scale is used 95 = gold, 90 = silver, 85 = bronze)

While all this is going on, the stewards are busy clearing the benches ready to set up and repour the wines that are called back. In a class of 50 wines usually 6-7 wines are recalled for what is, in effect, the gold medal round. I always invite the Chair of Judges to join the panellists at this stage, and request the stewards to randomise the wines so they aren’t poured in catalogue order.

I then ask all judges and the Chair to rate each wine gold, silver, bronze or nothing. After that process considerable discussion takes place, and the final medal colour of each wine, together with the best of them – or top gold – is decided. Sometimes a wine may miss out on a medal altogether. This isn’t strange because an individual judge may have thrown in a left-fielder like a very funky chardonnay or a very aldehydic sparkling wine to create a point of discussion.

When all the scores have been adjusted, the score sheets go to the wine show office for data input. All the top golds move on to the trophy judging at the end of the show for awards like best chardonnay, best shiraz etc. In the trophy judging, all fifteen judges ranked the wines in each category in order of preference. In a bracket of four wines that would be three for best wine through to zero for least wine. The wine with the highest total score is awarded the trophy.

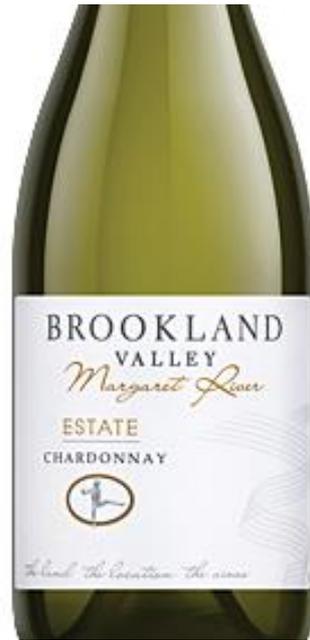
December 8, 2015

I've now finished my latest three year rotation at Hobart, and will miss being there next year. Hobart always has an affable, talented group of judges, and the ever-helpful stewards work hard to make sure everything runs smoothly. Another very positive feature of the show is the three year traineeship for associate judges. It's proved very successful, and many graduates have moved into the senior judging ranks.

I strongly suggest you peruse the results at http://www.hobartshowground.com.au/wineshow/docs/2015_hobart_wine_show-results_catalogue.pdf

Here are my views on wines that impressed me during the judging.

Chardonnay



2014 Brookland Valley Estate Margaret River Chardonnay This is a wine of intensity, freshness and structure, and its youthful restraint, balanced acidity and texture won everybody over. It went on to be awarded the Best White Wine of Show trophy. (\$38.00) ★★★★★
<http://www.winelistaustralia.com/wines.php?pid=2025&page=36&wine=Chardonnay>

2014 Coldstream Hills Reserve Yarra Valley Chardonnay Yet another outstanding example from this well established chardonnay line. It's very much in the modern white burgundy style, easily standing comparison with fine Meursault. Although very fresh and intense, it's strongly founded on structure and texture. (\$52.00) ★★★★★☆
<http://shortysliquor.com.au/coldstream-hill-reserve-chardonnay-2013>

2014 Juniper Estate Margaret River Chardonnay Surely this is one of the most consistently excellent Australian chardonnays. The intense white peach aroma and flavour is perfectly matched with nutty complexity, a creamy texture and refreshing acidity. (\$37.00) ★★★★★☆
<https://www.juniperestate.com.au/>

Riesling

2015 Pooley Margaret Pooley Tribute Riesling I've already raved about 2015 rieslings like the Clonakilla and the Larry Cherubino Porongurup. Here's another to add to the list. It's 100% pure Tasmanian – delicate, perfumed, reserved and dry, with a great line of acidity and perfect balance. (\$54.00) ★★★★★

<http://www.princewinestore.com.au/Product/tabid/60/540223/Pooley-Margaret-Riesling-2015>

2015 Seppelt Drumborg Riesling It's reserved and flinty at the moment, but this wine bursts into life on a dry, limey palate. Give it at least 2-3 years. (\$30.00) ★★★★★☆

<http://www.winestar.com.au/seppelt-drumborg-vineyard-riesling-2015>

2011 Pewsey Vale Vineyards The Contours Riesling Bottle age meets freshness and strong varietal character in this little gem. It's beginning to drink beautifully, and is a classic example of Eden Valley riesling. Don't be put off by a despised vintage. This is the real deal, and it should be available soon at around \$28.00. ★★★★★☆

Other Whites

2014 Yalumba Eden Valley Viognier A classic viognier that displays powerful apricot and ginger characteristics yet doesn't stray into the flabby overblown territory. This is a fantastic wine for the money and it's superior to some Rhône examples that sell for several times the price. (\$20.00) ★★★★★☆

<http://www.winestar.com.au/yalumba-eden-valley-viognier-2014>

2015 Eddystone Point Pinot Gris Here's a pinot gris that will make the Alsations feel uncomfortable. It shows the classic Williams pear varietal characteristics and is slightly sweet. The palate is unctuous, acid-fresh and long. (\$27.90) ★★★★★☆

<http://www.triowine.com.au/tasmanian/white-wine/pinot-gris/2015-eddystone-point-pinot-gris.html>

Pinot Noir

2014 Eddystone Point Pinot Noir This elegant Tasmanian pinot noir took out the trophy for best of its variety. The cherry aromas shine with varietal brightness, and toasty French oak provides just-right support. The palate has structure and presence. A bargain. (\$30.00) ★★★★★☆

<https://www.wineboss.com.au/Order.aspx?ref=tb2&wsrc=tb2>

2013 Pages Creek Pinot Noir Here's another Tasmanian pinot noir that offers both high quality and value for money. This Coal River valley wine offers powerful red berry characteristics backed by an appropriately firm structure and emerging complexity. Very stylish. (\$29.50) ★★★★★☆

<http://www.pagescreekwine.com.au/products/pages-creek-pinot-noir>

Shiraz

2013 Wynns Coonawarra Shiraz I applauded enthusiastically when this under-rated wine was announced as Best Dry Red of Show. Label drinkers may raise their eyebrows, but in its class the Wynns topped highly regarded reds such as Yalumba The Octavius, Brown Brothers Patricia, Bests Great Western Bin 0 and Eileen Hardy. It's a marvellous example of medium-bodied Coonawarra red, offering fresh red berry aromas and flavours, length of palate, fine tannins and regional acidity. On sale for almost-giveaway prices. (\$15.00) ★★★★★
<http://www.winestar.com.au/wynns-coonawarra-estate-shiraz-2013>

Red Blends

2014 Angove Family Crest Grenache Shiraz Mourvèdre Here's another excellent red at a bargain price. It's a vibrant young drink-now red with a delicate grenache perfume and a "juicy" satisfying palate backed by fine tannins. (\$22.00) ★★★★★
<https://www.angove.com.au/en/products/family-crest-grenache-shiraz-mourvedre>

2014 Robert Oatley Vineyards Signature Series McLaren Vale GSM The key to making good McLaren Vale red wine is to achieve ripeness of flavour without sacrificing freshness. This wine succeeds admirably. The rich red fruits flavour is beautifully balanced by the tannin structure and acidity. Delicious. (\$22.95) ★★★★★
<http://buywine.robertoatley.com.au/home/wines/?ref=wine-searcher&brand=robert-oatley-signature-series#brand>

2013 Rosemount Estate GSM We've sung the praises of this wine before, and once again it has distinguished itself at a wine show. It offers freshness and ripeness of aroma and flavour together with an opulent palate supported by fine, savoury tannins. (\$32.00) ★★★★★

Sparkling

In closing, please allow me to pay tribute to what is probably Australia's best-yet sparkling wine. It was awarded a silver medal, but it was a gold on my sheet.

2002 House of Arras EJ Carr Late Disgorged A very complex, fresh wine showing brioche and mushroom overtones. The palate is long and acid-fresh, with a very fine mousse. This marvellous sparkling wine is drinking superbly. (\$130.00) ★★★★★

Note: I'm happy to report that although the 2002 was awarded only a silver, the yet to be released 2003 was adjudged Best Sparkling Wine of Show.

Lester Jesberg

Winewise subscriptions <http://winewise.net.au/register/>