

Brown Brothers Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet

Brown Brothers Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet is unique. Nowhere else in the world does anyone blend the three varieties, let alone grow them on the same site. Mondeuse cuttings were first brought to Australia from Savoie, France in 1907 by François de Castella who, as Victorian State Viticulturist, had a significant influence on the development of the wine industry. They were planted at Milawa soon after.

A few years ago, Winewise panellist David Yeates and Andrew McFadzean of Lerida Estate, hatched a plan to collect as many vintages of Brown Brothers Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet as they could. Their success exceeded expectations, and they decided to inform Brown Brothers of their project. As it turned out David and Andrew had vintages that Brown Brothers did not, and vice versa.

Generously, Brown Brothers hosted David, Andrew, Frank Van de Loo (Mount Majura Vineyard) and myself at the winery for a 36 vintage tasting. Among those participating in the tasting were John Brown (who provided considerable background information), Ross Brown, chief viticulturist Brett McLen and BB brand ambassador Andrew Harris. The wines were poured in three flights, beginning with the oldest.

The first vintage of Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet was produced in 1954, when the three varieties were co-fermented in open concrete and brick fermentation vats.



The opening. Plenty of crumbly corks.

1961 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Browning edge. A little decay. Leathery. Still has some fruit. Hint of TCA. Quite firm and lean. Slightly stripped. Obviously, this was not a good bottle.

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1961 Shiraz Mondeuse Better colour. Fully mature leather, licorice and black truffle aromas. Good core of fruit. Quite firm, mainly due to the long-lasting tannin of the mondeuse, but still very much alive. ★★★☆

1962 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Impressively fresh. Attractively spicy, with bottle-age mushroom and leather. Still has sweet fruit. Firm but balanced. ★★★★★

*Higher than average rainfall during January, February and March.
Refrigeration plant installed to control fermentation temperatures. John Brown (JB)*

1963 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Rich and ripe. Certainly mature but still surprisingly youthful for a 55 year old wine. Slight raisin overtone. Rich and chewy. Still has life ahead. ★★★★★



The scene is set

1964 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Light colour, but still holding red tones. A lighter style with a vegetal edge. Powdery but not strong tannins. ★★★

1965 Shiraz Mondeuse There's some leather on the nose, but also a background floral perfume. This is a powerful wine of depth and substance, with plenty of mondeuse-induced tannin. Dare I suggest it still has time ahead of it? ★★★★★

A Bucher Guyer horizontal hydraulic stainless steel press replaces the wooden presses. JB

1966 Shiraz Mondeuse Powerful spicy fruit. Subtle bay leaf and mint aromas. Lovely fine long palate. Tannins in check. A great example that is drinking beautifully. ★★★★★

1967 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Remarkably fresh. Very appealing red and dark berry with mature complexity and faintly minty oak. Classic. Intense, firm and balanced. ★★★★★

A large proportion of pressings material was used in this wine. JB

John Graham Brown
worked his first
vintage alongside his
father John Charles
Brown in 1959. Joel
Tilbrook has occupied
the position of Chief
Winemaker since 2007.

1970 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Slightly leathery. Lacks fruit power on nose. Light and fairly plain. Tannins in check. ★★★
Good rainfall coupled with a big increase in yield resulted in a lighter wine of moderate colour. JB

1971 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Brown light colour. Aldehyde. Towards amontillado/tawny. Probably a bad bottle.

1972 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Lacks freshness. Vegemite edge to nose. Palate drying out.★★
Rainfall caused a mildew outbreak resulting in softer wine of moderate but poor colour. Flood irrigation was introduced in 1972.
JB

1973 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Fresh but minty/leafy. Pronounced spearmint overtones. Moderate tannins. Sliding downhill. Lacks weight.★★★

1974 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Quite advanced and leathery. Firm but hollow. Tannins linger.★★★

Minimal pruning was introduced in 1975 and the vines were retrained to a higher trellis. Crop levels went rampant with associated loss of wine quality. JB

1976 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Fairly dull nose. Slight spearmint edge. Better fruit on palate. Still has a very firm finish.★★★

1977 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Still comparatively fresh but slightly vegetal. Lacks mid palate. Firm but not hard.★★★
A violent storm cut a narrow path through Milawa in 1977 and destroyed the Anglican church, tore the roofs from many buildings and destroyed crops. <http://milawa.vic.au/town-history/>
Mondeuse escaped the storm! Shiraz and cabernet components sourced from elsewhere. JB

1979 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Light browning colour. Light and leathery.★★

1980 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Light colour. Red fruits with a slightly tired Vegemite edge. Still clinging to fruit.★★★

1981 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Nicely mature red berry and dried herbs. Holding up. Still fresh, with adequate fruit. Tannins ever-present.★★★

1982 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Very light colour. Corked.

1983 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Red fruits aromas with faint mint and bay leaf. Comparatively simple. Adequate fruit weight. Firm finish.★★★

1984 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Light colour and nose. Vegetal. Better palate but doesn't quite have the weight for the tannin.★★★

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1985 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Weaker, more developed colour. Light nose. Tired vegemite overtone. Hollow. ★★☆☆

1986 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Attractive red berry aromas - faintest leather. Firm. Still has good fruit, but it struggles with the tannin. ★★☆☆



John Graham Brown (left) and Ross Brown

1987 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Light colour. Red berry with Leathery overtones. Adequate weight. Firm but balanced. ★★☆☆

1988 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Fresh and spicy. Red fruits plus a hint of black truffle. Good fruit. Firm, savoury. Balanced. ★★☆☆

1990 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Light colour. Leathery Vegemite overtones. Drying out. ★★☆☆

1992 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Slightly better colour but still comparatively light. Attractively spicy. Retains freshness. Fruit not quite up to the tannins. ★★☆☆

1995 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Browning. Leathery, aged. Has fruit but is drying out. Tannins dominate. ★★☆☆

1996 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Strong red colour. Powerful red berry. Fragrant and spicy. Pristine and classic. Savoury tannins in balance. This is the rebirth of a classic Australian red wine. ★★☆☆

1997 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Great colour. Powerful red fruits with a leathery touch. Decidedly ripe fruit. Chewy tannins. ★★☆☆

1998 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Great colour. Intense. Loganberry with a hint of spicy coconut. Substantial, firm, balanced. A true cellaring style. ★★☆☆

2004 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Slightly corked. Nice fruit underneath. Strong red berry. Balanced tannins. I think a non-tainted bottle would be excellent.

2005 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Rich and ripe. Good concentration. Balanced lingering tannins. It has everything required for extended cellaring. ★★★★★

2006 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Powerful spicy dark berry nose. Another classic with great intensity and length of flavour. It will benefit from cellaring for decades. ★★★★★

2008 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Concentrated dark berry. Some coconut oak. Rich and comparatively round. Still has plenty of tannin and will cellar well. Maybe two decades rather than five? ★★★★★

2013 Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet Perfumed cherry, dark berry, spice. Opulence and balance. Savoury tannins. A great example with the lingering tannins imparted by the mondeuse. (\$90.00) ★★★★★
<https://www.brownbrothers.com.au/products/15516-shiraz-mondeuse-cabernet-sauvignon/>

This wine is still made via the method John C Brown pioneered in the 1950s where shiraz is first placed into the tanks for fermentation, followed by the cabernet sauvignon and then the mondeuse. This co-fermentation of varieties helps to integrate the flavours of the three and increases colour, flavour and tannin pickup during the process. This wine is made from a blend of 50% shiraz, 25% mondeuse, and 25% cabernet sauvignon fruit sourced from our Milawa vineyard. The fruit was harvested on the 15th of March 2013 at baumé levels ranging from 14.0° to 15.1°. Brown Brothers web site

This tasting provided us with much more than the story of Brown Brothers Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet. Follow the path of almost any Australian wine with a history of more than five decades and you'll discover much about the reality of our wine industry over that period.

The sixties was a golden decade. Viticulture was traditional, "minimal intervention", now a buzz term, was widely practised, and quality was often stellar, notwithstanding the basic technology of the period.

Australians quickly discovered that there was more to wine than port or sherry, and dry whites and reds were increasingly chosen for the dinner table. A wine boom ensued in the seventies, and wineries struggled to keep up with demand. Vineyards were planted hither and thither and much callow young vine material found its way into bottles.

Yields were pushed to the limit. The plague of minimal pruning descended upon parts of Australia and quality plummeted in line with the resultant over-cropping which was often accompanied by the failure of grapes to reach optimum ripeness. As if that wasn't enough, cork quality probably fell to its lowest in the 1975-85 period.

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It took years for demand to slow, vines to mature and for the drop in quality to be addressed by re-training of vineyards. It also took time for high quality wine to command a price commensurate with its true value. That, and the realisation by Brown Brothers that they had a true flagship wine in the Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet, led to a resurgence of the style in the nineties.



The heart of the blend. Brown Brothers mondeuse vines

The Browns have cast the vineyard net far and wide in the past few decades, so it's almost ironic that the grapes for the Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet grow within easy walking distance of Brown Brothers Milawa winery. The vines were replanted in 1985, and can certainly be considered to be of mature age. They are now producing fruit of the highest quality under the care of Brett McLen.

If you seek a red cellaring style that is unique and distinctive, now is the time to turn to the Brown Brothers Shiraz Mondeuse Cabernet. The glory days of the sixties have returned.

Lester Jesberg



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