

CLONAKILLA 50th

It was quite an event. For a relatively small winery to host the stars of the Australian wine media and winemaking fraternity was a huge undertaking, and to do it with flair speaks highly of the commitment, work ethic and hospitality of the Kirk family and Clonakilla staff.

The following wines were all tasted at the winery during the day of 6 October.

RIESLING



“Coolness of the nights is very important, giving us natural acidity. Grapes are now refrigerated where necessary before whole-bunch pressing (since 2015). We want drinkers to see the purity of fruit.” **Tim Kirk (TK)**

1994 Riesling Quite mature, but still shows attractive citrus aromatics. Holding up very well, but is on the way down. ★★☆☆

1997 Riesling Attractive combination of maturity and freshness. Toasty lime. Drinking very well indeed, and is at its peak. ★★★★★

1998 Riesling Deep gold colour. Tired nose. Richly-fruited, but drying out. Still pleasantly drinkable. ★★★

2001 Riesling Developed and honeyed, but has good weight of fruit backed up by acidity. ★★★

2003 Riesling (Screwcap) Fully mature, but retains vibrancy. Faint marmalade/stone fruit overtone. Good depth of flavour with balanced acid support. ★★★★★

2003 Riesling (Cork) Deeper colour and far more development – to the point of maderisation. Clinging to fruit but well past its peak. ★★

2004 Riesling Beautifully mature and impressively fresh. Toasty citrus aromatics. Bone dry palate offering good length of flavour and very steely acidity. ★★★★★

2005 Riesling Fresh and restrained. Delicate citrus aromas. Intense, dry, textural and long. Beautifully made. ★★★★★

2006 Riesling Rich nose tending to stone fruit. Comparatively forward, but still definitely has time to go. Drinking well. ★★★★★

2010 Riesling Fresh citrus. Lively and attractive. Delightful, balanced and long. Still a youngster. ★★★★★

2011 Riesling Quite limey, with a faintly grassy edge. Plenty of citrus flavour. Acid prominent. ★★★★★

2012 Riesling Fresh citrus/stone fruit aromas. Intense and comparatively unevolved. Dry and lingering. Uncompromising. ★★★★★☆

2013 Riesling A pristine floral/citrus riesling. It's tight, lively, youthful and long. ★★★★★☆

2014 Riesling Intense and fresh, with a hint of lime marmalade. Dry, long and racy. Very appealing. ★★★★★☆

2015 Riesling Lacks the aromatic qualities of some of the other wines. Has palate weight and lively acidity. ★★★★★☆

2016 Riesling Slightly developed. Some citrus overtones. A little phenolic grip. Fresh flavour, but the palate is slightly unyielding. ★★★★★☆

2017 Riesling Fresh lemon nose. Just emerging from its shell. Good weight of citrus fruit. Cleansing acidity. ★★★★★

2018 Riesling Showing some development at the expense of aromatics. Seems to be in an “in-between” phase. ★★★★★☆

2019 Riesling Classic Canberra District lemon pith. Admirable depth of flavour supported by typical acidity. Will age well. ★★★★★☆

2021 Riesling Citrus aroma. Slightly forward. A little neutral at the moment. Needs time. ★★★★★☆

2022 Riesling Pristine floral primary nose. Very expressive and pure, with a long finish and lingering acidity. ★★★★★☆

SHIRAZ VIOGNIER

John Kirk planted shiraz in 1972, and, after making blends of cabernet and shiraz, produced the first Clonakilla Shiraz in 1990. He fortuitously planted viognier in 1986. Tim Kirk experienced a “transformative” moment after meeting Marcel Guigal, and the concept of a shiraz viognier blend was firmly implanted in his mind.

“We are doing our best to capture the Australian landscape and express it through the medium of wine, moving away from the traditional Australian style of shiraz. From 1993 we incorporated up to 33% whole bunches. We often macerate for 2½ – 3 weeks because it achieves better fineness of tannins. We co-ferment with viognier, and use only French oak – never more than 33% new.” **TK**

The tasting was arranged in three sections - Luminous (cool), Ethereal (temperate) and Glow (warm) – and the format was well received by the tasters. For the convenience of our readers I’ve listed the wines in vintage order. The 2005, 2008 & 2015 Shiraz Viognier, and 2009 and 2018 Syrah were consumed and assessed at the dinner which followed the tasting.

1994 Shiraz Viognier Very mature nose showing some mushroom. Drying out on the finish. **Temperate** ★★★

“Terrible frost 20th October. Big crop loss. Three barrels made.” **TK**

1995 Shiraz Viognier Pale mature colour. Fully developed nose with a herbal edge. (Shiraz/pinot noir 10%/viognier 10%) Drying out but clinging to what fruit is left. **Cool** ★★★

1997 Shiraz Viognier Decidedly leathery and aged. Starting to dry out, leaving the tannins to take control. **Temperate** ★★★

1998 Shiraz Viognier Very mature leather/mushroom. Drying out. **Warm** ★★★

2001 Shiraz Viognier Mature nose, but still shows some red fruits. Quite firm. Unlikely to improve. **Temperate** ★★★★★

Won fame on release. Tim reports significant bottle variation.

2002 Shiraz Viognier Decidedly northern Rhône mature bouquet showing tilled earth, mushroom and charcuterie. Still pleasant to drink but beginning to dry out. **Cool** ★★★

2003 Shiraz Viognier Rich, red/dark fruits aromas. Hint of leather. Palate holding together although tannins are quite firm and drying. **Warm** ★★★★★

2004 Shiraz Viognier Delicate red fruits nose tending to raspberry. Mature florals – even faintly jammy. Long-flavoured but quite firm on the finish. **Temperate** ★★★★★

2005 Shiraz Viognier Drinking very well indeed, and right in the zone when it comes to perfume, length and fine tannins. ★★★★★

2006 Shiraz Viognier Fully ripe, but with a decidedly delicate perfumed touch. Fine tannins on a medium-bodied palate. Drinking well. Classic Clonakilla. **Temperate** ★★★★★

2007 Shiraz Viognier Dark berry aromas with a faint touch of toasted nuts. Probably at its peak. The rich fruit is coping with the comparatively firm tannins. **Warm** ★★★★★

“A frost year. Seven barrels only (150 cases) One barrel was rejected, leaving six.” **TK**

2008 Shiraz Viognier A gloriously silky wine that still shows the perfume and spice that distinguished its youthful years. In its drinking window but will continue to age gracefully. ★★★★★

2009 Shiraz Viognier On the edge of cherry jam, with floral viognier overtones. Fully ripe palate balanced by fine tannins. **Warm** ★★★★★

2010 Shiraz Viognier Very much in the slightly vegetal Côte Rôtie spectrum. Impressively fresh. Gorgeously silky and delightfully drinkable, although on the light side. **Cool** ★★★★★

2011 Shiraz Viognier Very perfumed, with a touch of stems. Full of life. Beautifully elegant palate with the finest of tannins providing the perfect level of firmness. **Cool** ★★★★★☆

“We left half the shiraz unpicked.” **TK**

2012 Shiraz Viognier Could be mistaken for a very fine Côte Rôtie. Red berries and violets with an appealing stemminess. Long, silky and fine. Brilliant. Needs 5-10 years to show its best. **Cool** ★★★★★★

“We’re very grateful for every bit of light in seasons like this.” **TK**

2013 Shiraz Viognier Splendidly perfumed – raspberry, strawberry, redcurrant – with floral and stemmy nuances. Tannins still fairly firm, but in balance. Needs to evolve further. **Temperate** ★★★★★

2014 Shiraz Viognier Viognier quite obvious here, competing with the red berry aromatics. Supple, silky palate that is fresh and long. Needs time. **Temperate** ★★★★★☆

2015 Shiraz Viognier This wine was served at dinner alongside an outstanding Côte Rôtie. It held its own. A fragrant, intense, finely structured wine, and surely one of Clonakilla’s best. ★★★★★★

2016 Shiraz Viognier Very attractive floral notes with overtones of raspberry and stems. Fresh and appealing. Vibrant silky palate. Years to go. **Warm** ★★★★★☆

2017 Shiraz Viognier Beautifully perfumed floral/raspberry. Needs a little more weight but is a joy to drink. **Cool** ★★★★★

2018 Shiraz Viognier Vivid colour. Plenty of purple. Opulent perfumed dark cherry. Silky and totally satisfying, but can be cellared ten years at least. **Warm** ★★★★★★

2019 Shiraz Viognier Delightfully floral - violets and rose petals together with cherries and subtle stemminess. Great example of this style. Long palate with fine, persistent tannins. *Warm* ★★★★★

2021 Shiraz Viognier Bright cerise colour. Attractive stemminess. Vibrant raspberries and rose petals – even Turkish delight. The palate is bursting with life, but doesn't have quite the length of the great years. Needs at least five years to soften. *Cool* ★★★★★

SYRAH

“No viognier. No whole bunch. We wanted to make it as purely and simply as possible. It comes from same source every year. Probably the most sun-saturated block on the whole estate.” **TK**



2006 Syrah Attractive red berry with faint charcuterie influence. Just enough fruit backed up by fine tannins. ★★★★★

2008 Syrah Appealing cherry/rose petal perfume. Fine, long and beautifully balanced. ★★★★★☆

2009 Syrah Served with dinner alongside a very good Cornas, and outclassed that wine. It's spicy, floral and utterly satisfying. ★★★★★

- 2012 Syrah** Hermitage-like floral, dark cherry, and charcuterie overtones. Power and finesse. ★★★★★
- 2013 Syrah** Elegant, complex nose. Subtle red fruits. Really delivers on the long, fine, firm palate. ★★★★★☆
- 2015 Syrah** Clonakilla moved to puncheons for oak maturation. Wonderfully fresh and perfumed, peppery nose showing cherry and rose petal aromatics. Sublime palate. ★★★★★
- 2016 Syrah** Floral red fruits with a hint of grilled beef. Understated but very appealing. Delicious and silky. ★★★★★☆
- 2018 Syrah** Served at dinner with the stunning 2017 Jaboulet Hermitage La Chapelle, it was set a task that was performed with distinction. Spicy and sumptuous, it will thrive with bottle age. ★★★★★☆
- 2019 Syrah** Vibrant, spicy, peppery dark cherry. Opulent, balanced, medium-bodied. Great structure. ★★★★★

OTHER RED WINES

- 2016 Western Vineyard** Delicate and fragrant, but stemmy. Too lean and green. ★★★
- 2016 T & L Block 1** Rose petal with a stemmy influence. Good depth of fruit. Tannins firm. ★★★★★☆
- 2017 Western Vineyard** Quite perfumed. Fruit carries the oak and stem notes well. ★★★★★
- 2018 Western Vineyard** Even more rose petal. Touch of toasty oak. Firm, fine, balanced tannins. Good fruit weight. ★★★★★
- 2018 T & L Block 1** Fresh raspberry/strawberry. Delicate and silky. ★★★★★☆
- 2019 T & L Block 1** Slightly more depth of colour (purple) than the 2018 Block 1. More power of similar fruit. Hint of charcuterie. Lovely fruit. Firm but balanced. Will enjoy a long life. ★★★★★
- 2019 T & L Block 1** Vibrant, perfumed and spicy. Great depth of flavour. Firm but balanced. Certainly needs time. ★★★★★☆

When I moved to Canberra a long time ago, I didn't imagine having a world-class wine producer 20 minutes' drive from my home. That is now – and has been for nearly two decades - a reality. Bravo Clonakilla.

Lester Jesberg