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contact us

editor
jodie o'sullivan
(02) 6024 0581
jodie_osullivan@bordermail.com.au

fashion
kylie duryea
(02) 6024 0637
kylie_duryea@bordermail.com.au

food and drinks
fresh@bordermail.com.au

writer
mick mcglone
(02) 6024 0549
mick_mcglone@bordermail.com.au

designers
john charlton, steve smith

cover



design: john charlton
picture: john russell

tastings

with david sutherland



A fruitful experience

JUDGING wine is a tough job, physically and mentally.

The use of one's senses of sight, smell and taste over a period of a few hours can be a fatiguing activity.

Adding the concentration required in analysing the wines and verbalising one's observations and conclusions, it is no wonder that I was feeling a little tired and emotional after a judging in the Wodonga region earlier this month.

The Wodonga and District Fruit, Flower & Herb Winemakers Guild is a group of amateur enthusiasts, which has a passion for making their own wines.

They meet once a month at Elgin's Hotel in Wodonga to discuss, research, taste and swap information about their shared passion.

This is a group of people having fun, "having a go", developing their skills and coincidentally, making some very drinkable wines at the same time.

As the name indicates, guild members make wine from all sorts of things.

There are the grape wines, which I judged, and then there are the "country wines", which include the following: stone fruit, berries, citrus, other fruit and fortified, vegetables, herbs and grains, flowers and mead.

My experience in judging amateur wines in the past has sometimes filled me with trepidation.

Making wine in small lots is a difficult thing to do because you have to be very precise with volumetric additions and small volumes implies large surface area to volume ratios — which means that the potential for oxidation is greater than for larger volumes.

It was therefore with some surprise that I tasted the grape wine sections and found very few faulty wines.

In fact, there were some very high quality wines in the line-ups, wines with fruit intensity, length and overall balance. The test of the quality of these wines was actually the next day when all participants in the event came together for a barbecue lunch at the Tangambalanga tasting venue.

The wines were re-tasted and enjoyed with food and I had no hesitation in enjoying them as beverage wines. I enjoyed judging the sparkling wines, which included both grape and country wines.

It is challenging tasting wines with flavours that are unfamiliar to me in wine but the same principles of judging still apply.

If anyone is interested in becoming involved in amateur winemaking phone Jacques Garnier on 0400 934 334.

THE Border Wine Room will start its wine appreciation course program for 2009 on April 28.

The course will be held over five consecutive Tuesdays, starting at 6pm each evening for 2½ hours.

The course focuses on understanding wine through a concentrated program of tasting.

The cost for the whole course is \$330 per person. For further details phone the Border Wine Room on (02) 6021 0900, David Sutherland 0409 800 870, or go to www.borderwineroom.com.au

grape expectations

with max crus



The postcard from purgatory

LONG ago, catching up with far-flung mates was fraught with shortcomings:

Ne'er a proper bed, air conditioning, food in the fridge, safe parking, enough wine (let alone a clean glass), enough shampoo (let alone a clean towel), toilet paper (let alone a clean toilet), etc.

Disappointingly, despite their wallets growing commensurately with their bellies, my mates still struggle with the essentials.

Take Rimbrant for instance: Rich beyond his wildest dreams, yet you arrive five seconds too late and you are forced to sleep in a tent in lieu of another guest getting first dibs. What happened to frequent visitor points?

Furthermore, after a decade-long drought and equally long lack of infrastructure spending, the entire house is surrounded by a dust bowl, through which you must eventually cross to said guest-tent.

But his hospitality is legendary — after you wash the dishes that is, which you must do because the kitchen still harbours the unwashed



remains of earlier visits — and diners of fresh farm-laid food (so named for the duck poo and dirt garnish) are a delight under the stars, except he'd run out of insect repellent.

When dawn arrives (staring you in the face through the mesh walls of the tent) other shortcomings emerge: no Panadol, no clean water, guest number one has exhausted the hot water — correction, exhausted the gas, so no brekkie because if there was anything

in the fridge apart from dirty duck eggs, you'd have to eat it raw.

And don't get me started on the outdoor dunny, and I mean really outdoor: no walls, just a (dusty) bowl and cistern, reminiscent of a chimney around which a grand homestead once stood, now memorial to unfulfilled aspirations, expectations and stupidity.

Luckily the yarns around the campfire (lounge room) always compensate; just remember to BYO.



Balthazar of the Barossa 2005 Shiraz, \$60: Seldom does the Big Ant go to bed with a bottle unfinished, but the previous two were 16 per cent so the weekend's excesses were taking their toll. — 8.8/10

Yeringberg Yarra Valley Shiraz 2006, \$40: You know those times you almost feel like a pinot but just not quite enough? Well, a Yarra Valley shiraz is the perfect alternative, real red with the 'fistication of pinot and none of the poof. — 8.5/10

Cargo Road Gewurztraminer 2008, \$22: Thick and chewy with loads of 'G' stuff so have it with a couple of dim mates and some overcooked calamari with chilli and spice. And check out the cool scooter chick on the cover. — 8.6/10

Dog Ridge The Pup McLaren Vale Shiraz 2007, \$18: Perfect for the doghouse at home or away. Gruntley's favourite wine, and Michael Clarke's too. Whoops spilled some ... out, damn Spot. — 8.4/10

Heemskerk Tasmania 2008 Riesling, \$40: Freight to Tassie has gone up, this has nearly doubled prices in four years, making it one of Australia's most expensive rieslings. But it's still worthy. — 8.8/10

top drop

with david sutherland

dal zotto riesling

vintage: 2008
price: \$18

RIESLING has always, in my opinion, been the best varietal to come from the King Valley on a consistent basis.

From the late 1970s onwards, King Valley riesling has a good track record and has always shown good longevity as well.

The Dal Zotto family has also made some crackers. This 2008 wine is on par for the course. Pale straw in colour with hints of green, the nose is typically citrus-like with subtle floral highlights. The palate is dry but with lovely fruit weight displaying citrus, blossom and nicely balanced acidity on the finish.

with food: perfect with seafood, great on its own
ageing: drink now or until 2013
RATING: ★★★★★
IN A WORD: yes!



cofield wines fifth son

vintage: 2007
price: \$20

THIS needs an explanation.

Max and Karen Cofield have four sons and they view the winery as their fifth son, such is their commitment to the success of the business.

Composed from the classic Bordeaux varieties of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot, I must admit to liking this a lot.

Medium deep in colour with ripe redcurrant and blood plums on the nose, plus a hint of pleasant oak; the palate is mid-weight with lots of fine but dry tannins nicely balanced by the "red berry" fruit characters.

with food: just about any red meat — rare and savoury
ageing: three to four years
RATING: ★★★★★½
IN A WORD: classy



boggy creek pinot gris

vintage: 2008
price: \$20

IT must be said that Graeme Ray likes pinot gris, so much so that he produces three versions in most years.

When conditions are favourable he does this crisp, fruity style, a rich barrel-fermented wine that is fuller-bodied and textural, and also a sweet dessert-style wine.

This is intense and fruity while at the same time dry and mineral-like. The nose has attractive almond nut and pear characters, which follow through onto the palate with touches of honeysuckle and herbs. The acid is fresh and balanced with excellent flavour intensity and length. Yummy!

with food: sauteed chicken in a white wine cream sauce
ageing: drink within two years
RATING: ★★★★★
IN A WORD: terrific

