

WINE News

Cool deals from New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.



AUGUST 13, 2018 FEATURES

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Finding Their Own Path: The Wines of NZ, Oz and SA

By Stefanie Juelsgaard

The last few months have seen some exciting new additions to the New Zealand, Australia and South Africa categories. Not only have we received containers overseas from both Oz and NZ, featuring some of our favorite direct imports, we have also seen a great influx of South African wines from young winemakers looking to showcase the terroir-driven varietals of the Swartland. In an enlightening new write-up from critic James Suckling, he praises the direction South Africa is moving in its wine production. He states, "Wine lovers, take note: South Africa is on its game for white wines! The country's whites are now deserving

of every wine consumer's attention, not least for the excellent value they have to offer." Never before has winemaking been so exciting and true to place in each of these countries, as all three are settling into their own identities. Gone are the days of copying other region's methods as each embraces their unique terroir and style. I'm also incredibly excited and honored to include myself in the category of new additions to this section as buyer. I've been working with these three phenomenal countries since I started at K&L and I can't wait to offer them to new customers and veterans alike.

2015 Mount Langi Ghiran "Billi Billi" Shiraz Grampians Victoria (\$13.99)

From one of the most highly acclaimed estates in all of Australia, the Billi Billi Shiraz is a fantastic example of the cool climate style coming out of this region. The concentration and power that Shiraz carries is present, but a long acid line and bright spice character create beautiful balance. The mountainous region this fruit grows in helps to create energy, vibrancy and punchy minerality. **91 VN**



2015 Savage "White" Western Cape (\$29.99)

This is a great representation of the new style of white wines coming out of South Africa right now. With 44% Sauvignon Blanc, 36% Semillon, 11% Clairette Blanche and 9% Chenin Blanc, this wine is incredibly fresh and lively with bright acidity and great length. The old, large format French oak used helps round out the sharp edges. From a mix of altitude and maritime vineyards, this wine shows great complexity. **93 RP, 93 VN, 93 WS**



2015 Tongue in Groove "Cabal Vineyard" Pinot Noir Waipara Valley (\$29.99)

This may be my absolute favorite wine on the shelf right now. The fruit demonstrates great drive and length without plushness and earthy clay notes bring a deep and brooding quality. The grapes are grown organically and biodynamically in Waipara, fermented with wild yeasts, and the 40% whole bunches used results in well-rounded tannin and structure. **94-95 RC, 93 BC, 91 RP**



Framingham: A Riesling Obsession I Fully Support

Framingham Winery in Marlborough had a pretty stellar 2017 considering the trials and tribulations the region had to go through. A springtime earthquake, followed by a cool and windy summer, then a rainy autumn certainly pushed the team to their limits. The harvest-time rain turned out to be quite a blessing, though, for this well-known Riesling producer, which owns the oldest Riesling vines in the appellation. The botrytis that resulted from the wet conditions made for the best set of Rieslings we've ever seen from Framingham. They ran the entire Prädikatswein range this year, from their Kabinett-style Old Vine to their viscous and syrupy Trockenbeerenauslese. New Zealand Riesling is a truly phenomenal thing to taste and Framingham's may be the best.

2017 Framingham F-Series "Old Vine" Riesling Marlborough (\$22.99) A combination of longer hang time, wild yeast fermentation, and 11 months of lees aging have resulted in serious complexity here. From the oldest blocks, planted in 1981, these vines produce wines of great length, acidity and delicacy.



2017 Framingham "Select" Riesling Marlborough (\$19.99) Vinted with only 5% botrytised fruit, this Riesling sits around the Spätlese level of sweetness. This is the wine I buy cases of, as it is my personal favorite for spicy dinner dishes like Thai and Indian. You do get a sense of the sweeter fruit, but there is still bright, crisp acidity and the underlying petrol note you'd swear was German. **96 BC, 95 RC**

2017 Framingham "Noble" Riesling Marlborough (375ml \$22.99) Having 75% botrytised fruit, the Noble is at the Beerenauslese level of sweetness. This low-alcohol stunner is sure to please all guests as a great pairing for sweet desserts or a cheese course. **97-98 RC, 96 BC, 90 RP**

2017 Framingham "F-Series" Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese Marlborough (375ml \$49.99) This comes from 100% botrytised berries that were picked over a series of three different runs. It was fermented in both stainless steel and neutral barrel, giving vibrancy and depth. This one is drinkable now, but will keep for at least 10 years. **100 RC, 99 BC, 93 RP**



South African White Wines: Gaining Ground and Bucking Tradition

South Africa is having a stand-out moment, especially for its white varietal wines and blends that are true to their particular site and style. For much of the past, whites from this region largely went into bulk or dessert wine production. Recently, however, winemakers are breaking the mold and showing the public the distinctive and exceptional wines of this unmatched country. Higher-acid, crisp, fresh whites are becoming the new norm, with low oak use allowing varietal characters to shine. The soils here are some of the oldest in the world and their flavor profiles are definitely present in these wines. Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc are a few varietals to look out for, each presenting site specificity, from traditional areas such as Constantia or up-and-comer Swartland.

2017 Bayten Sauvignon Blanc Constantia (\$13.99) Vines have been growing in this region for over three centuries and amazingly have been able to withstand the battering effects of the strong wind currents coming off



the ocean. Oftentimes, winemakers have to worry about the fruit not reaching sufficient ripeness levels due to these cool climate conditions. The result is fresh, crisp, lively Sauvignon Blanc that brilliantly shows off its maritime-influenced site. **90 WE**

2017 De Wetshof "Bon Vallon" Chardonnay Robertson (\$17.99) This wine truly expresses its limestone terroir, showing great minerality and nice richness of fruit from the warmer inland climate. This wine is unoaked, which helps keep it fresh and linear, and classic Chardonnay notes shine in the form of lemon rind, peach, white flower and almond. **91 WS**

2015 Alheit "Hemelrand Vine Garden" White Field Blend Walker Bay (\$34.99) In recognition of how wine was made decades ago, this vineyard, planted in 2010, is a field blend with five different varieties interplanted. The final blend changes year-to-year based on the growth of each individual variety, which is determined by that year's weather. A general mix of Chenin Blanc, Roussanne, Chardonnay, Verdelho and Muscat, this wine is incredibly expressive and complex, and quite distinct from anything else on the shelf. **93 RP, 91 VN**



Discussion of regionalism with Michael Dhillon, John Duval, Mark Davidson, Tim Kirk and Bruce Tyrrell.

Australia Decanted: The Best in Aussie Winemaking Come Stateside

Australian winemakers are through with apologizing for their style of wine. Gone are the days of being relieved when their wines don't get picked out as "Australian" in blind tastings. No longer are they striving to get mistaken for California or Burgundy. They have come into their own in style and substance and it's time you reintroduce yourself to some of the best winemakers and varietals coming out of this remarkable country.

I was fortunate enough last month to attend "Australia Decanted," a four-day seminar put on by Wine Australia to educate American wine professionals about what is current in Aussie wine. Australia is lucky in a way to have such a relatively short winemaking history, as it opens the door for them to every and any grape they want to plant, allowing them to make wine their way. During this seminar I met some of the leading winemakers in Australia and learned what is making this country such a powerhouse in the current wine world. They have incredibly diverse landscapes and weather, and no one style can be used to describe the entire country. True, there are vineyards that are inevitably going to produce wines of higher alcohol because of the warmer days. As Steve Pannell of S.C. Pannell put it, "How much Barolo is less than 14.5 to 15% alcohol? Does anybody care? Nope. It's, 'is the wine good?'" What makes good Barolo can be found true anywhere else in the world and the answer is balance. Aussie winemakers are finally comfortable enough to stop emulating other countries and truly work with what is unique to their environment. Mac Forbes of Mac Forbes Wines summed the sentiment up nicely, stating, "Rather than saying it's different and we're embarrassed, now we're saying it's different and it's great."

Australian winemakers will make a bigger style of wine, if that is what the vineyard calls for, but many are scaling back and coaxing lower alcohols and brighter, fresher fruit out of their vines. New World wines have to be transparent for us to learn—what's the point in making a super big, rich wine that tastes like it could come from anywhere when it takes so much effort? These sentiments were voiced from many winemakers at the conference. Winemakers with 40-plus years experience such as former Penfolds winemaker John Duval (now at John Duval Wines) and Bruce Tyrrell of Tyrrell's Wines are as willing to experiment with their regions as any of the new kids are. And there are many styles to fit any palate, from the marine-influenced Margaret River coast, known for its Cabernet Sauvignon, to the Clare Valley, perfect Riesling country thanks to its large diurnal shifts in temperature.

Australia is also making some phenomenal Grenache and is home to the world's oldest continuously producing Grenache vines, planted in 1848. Aussies want wine to fit their lifestyle and their food and, as many live on the coast, they want a fresh, bright red that pairs with many dishes. The **2015 Bethany Estate "Old Vine" Grenache Barossa Valley (\$24.99)** comes from vines planted in 1852, and the **2015 Cirillo Estate "The Vincent" Grenache Barossa Valley (\$29.99)** from a mix of vines aged from 80 to 100 years old. These are two fantastic examples of wines with concentration from old-vine fruit and lift from masterful vineyard work. Not only are styles and varieties being re-learned, but even long-held beliefs as to which clones work best are being questioned. Traditional "Dijon clones" have been used in many countries with the assumption that they are some of the best. Winemakers in Australia, however, are finding that while these clones work well in Burgundy to speed up sugar production and acid loss, they create pretty and elegant, but not interesting, wines in Australia.



While Australia is looking into growing grapes other than the "noble" varieties, such as Vermentino and Nero d'Avola, the majority of their plantings still come in the form of Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Chardonnay. Each variety shows differently in the various regions of this country that is almost as big as the United States. Cabernet Sauvignon made in the Yarra Valley is elegant and long-lived, while the same grape made in Margaret River is deep, succulent and powerful. The same applies to their most popular export, Shiraz. Traditionally, Shiraz from the Barossa is more brooding, darker fruited and richer. However, Shiraz from the Canberra district is lean, herbal and light-bodied thanks to their cool climate. But the overall point of the conference was not to focus on any one variety or winemaker, it was to highlight that Australians are finally making the right wine for them—wines they want to drink, wines they are proud of and wines they want to pass on to future generations.



Yarra Valley vineyard in the winter months—August, for instance.

Helen's Hill: The Yarra Valley at Its Best

Helen's Hill has quickly become a favorite among our staff and customers for its wide range of appeal for Burgundy and California lovers alike. The cool climate of the Yarra Valley lends great structure and complexity to the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and single-clone bottlings provide distinct, site-specific characteristics.

2016 Helen's Hill "Ingram Road" Chardonnay Yarra Valley Victoria (\$17.99) This Chardonnay has incredible balance and breadth, with rich fruit notes and roundness from the oak toast. The cool climate influence shows here, with a fresh palate and crystalline lift. The formula Helen's Hill has discovered through working with their terroir has paid off. This wine has elements that would appeal to every Chardonnay enthusiast, from generous acid upfront to a rounded, creamy base at the end. **94 JH**

2016 Helen's Hill "Ingram Road" Pinot Noir Yarra Valley Victoria (\$17.99) This wine blew me away with how good it is. There is a flintiness and herbal character that I haven't come across in any other Pinot Noirs coming out of Australia. This wine is crunchy and super bright and has incredible length that stays with you for an unprecedented amount of time. Helen's Hill has found a way to utilize French oak to add depth and complexity that complements the elements of their cool climate site.



2014 Helen's Hill "First Light" Pinot Noir Yarra Valley Victoria (\$24.99) This Pinot Noir is made entirely from the MV6 clone, which was pulled from Clos Vougeot in 1831, with the MV standing for "Mother Vine." This particular vineyard was planted in 1980 and the 38-year-old vines produce small and concentrated berries, which give dried herb and spice notes. This clone does particularly well in cool climate regions of Australia, displaying elegant dark berry and cherry flavors. **95 JH**

2014 Helen's Hill "Range View Reserve" Pinot Noir Yarra Valley Victoria (\$24.99) Planted exclusively to the Pommard clone, the Range View vineyard sits near the top of Helen's Hill. This clone gives deep, concentrated, powerful structure and flavors with plum and cherry dominating the fruit side and earthy notes complementing. This wine shows a little more meaty and powerful than the First Light. **96 JH**

2015 Helen's Hill "Hill Top" Syrah Yarra Valley Victoria (\$19.99) There is a lot of care and delicacy that goes into this Syrah as is evident by the extensive time spent hand-picking the entire vineyard. The fruit is picked at optimal ripeness and the long post-fermentation maceration results in great depth of color and structure. The wine is matured and aged in French oak (45% new, 55% old), which adds even more complexity and intensity of flavor. **96 JH**



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