

WINE News

Harvest the values from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.



MARCH 26, 2018 FEATURES

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Varietals Are the Spice of Life

By Brian Fogarty

Discovery is why we drink wine, and most often, the reason that we proactively share our favorite wines with friends. We want our close circle to experience the same joy and revelation we found in a unique flavor, smell or pairing. This is the obvious yet regularly overlooked reason there are five glasses in a bottle: community.

Joining K&L late last year as the buyer for wines of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, I found myself back on the glorious side of discovery and new wonder. I have recently experienced a vast range of wines, many that I had not seen in years, if ever, thanks to K&L's ability

to direct import rare gems. In my 18 years in the wine business, I have had the pleasure of sharing wine stories and pairings tableside as a sommelier for Park Hyatt in Vail, Colorado and Maui, Hawaii; built and filled wine cellars with unbelievable treasures for the people of Chicago's North Shore; and helped European wineries build their presence nationally, through marketing. Now, for the first time in a long time, I am back in the business of sharing new wine stories, as well as catching up on what's new with some old favorites. The three wines featured below have been particularly noteworthy and memorable, right out of the gate.

2016 Thorn-Clarke "Eden Trail" Riesling Eden Valley South Australia (\$17.99)

This is certainly my No. 1 most riveting wine of the quarter! A grippy, racy, mineral-driven dry Riesling that reminds you why this noble grape has chameleon-like adaptability to region, and the pedigree to express greatness in unique terroir. Eden Valley is the polar opposite to its neighbor Barossa on the other side of the mountains, with cooler growing conditions making for a stunning wine well under \$20! **95 JH, 91 VN**



2016 Gabrielskloof "Rosebud" Syrah-Viognier Rosé Bot River (\$14.99) It is rare this old wine guy is stumped for descriptors, and the group I was tasting with was mesmerized and oddly silent as we swirled, sniffed and swirled again with furrowed brows. Initially this coral pink wine resembled Sancerre under your nose, with a dry forest floor, woody element. A touch of wild strawberry barely caressed the bouquet to let you know it was rosé, but there was something else no one could describe, but we all loved!



2014 Moss Wood "Wilyabrup" Cabernet Sauvignon Margaret River Western Australia (\$69.99) The nose is an intense array of black cherry, blackberry, baking spice and a mintiness that leans toward crushed eucalyptus seed dried in the sun. Cassis and vanilla bean develop with time in the glass. On the palate the fruit and spice elements persist as the tannins reveal structure that embraces the flavors. Surprisingly balanced at its young age—there's no surprise why the critics are already swooning. **97 JH, 96 JS, 95 RP**



Clairault and Streicker Estate: The Ones to Watch in Margaret River

By Stefanie Juelsgaard

Margaret River is fast gaining recognition as one of Australia's leading regions for premium wine production. It can be a daunting task to grow both award-winning Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay in the same area, yet the wine estate Clairault and Streicker are not only managing it, but excelling at it. The Clairault vines were first planted in 1976, making them some of the oldest vines in Margaret River, which as a wine-producing region is only about 50 years old. Today they have vineyards in diverse terroirs throughout the region. Both labels are quite small, with production around 3,000 cases for Streicker and 15,000 cases for Clairault annually. The wines are exquisite and belong under the "premium" category alongside such labels as Vasse Felix and Leeuwin Estate.



2013 Streicker "Bridgeland Block" Sauvignon Blanc-Semillon Margaret River (\$16.99) This wine is hand-harvested at optimum acid levels to give it just the right lift. It is super fresh, with lovely tropical notes. No malolactic fermentation keeps brightness, and nine months in French oak add richness and weight. **93 JH**

2012 Streicker "Ironstone Block" Cabernet Sauvignon Margaret River (\$29.99) This wine exhibits deep, purple fruit from the afternoon sun it sees. Bright and juicy, the fruit presents a little riper, but this wine has the tannins to keep it from being flabby. **96 JH**

2014 Clairault "Estate" (Black Label) Chardonnay Margaret River (\$24.99) There is richness and toastiness from the 40% new French oak, but the decision to maintain the wine's malic acid really illuminates this wine, making it taste very high-end. **96 JH, 92 RP**

2014 Clairault (White Label) Cabernet Sauvignon Margaret River (\$19.99) This wine highlights the eucalyptus notes Margaret River is known for, along with a slight smoky and stemmy quality, which adds interest and depth, complemented by deep fruit, while still maintaining quite a light mouthfeel for Cabernet. **94 JH**

2012 Clairault "Estate" (Black Label) Cabernet Sauvignon (\$29.99) There is more fruit presence here and less of a vegetal note in this wine, which shows silky tannins, softness of fruit, and a nice acidity to boost the flavors. It is well balanced, elegant and very tasty. **95 JH**



Elegance and Grace from Barossa: The Wines of Jason Schwarz

By Ryan Woodhouse

Jason Schwarz's wines are a beautiful illustration of just how refined and balanced Barossa wines can be. He makes tiny amounts of wines, most coming from old vines (up to 130 years) and distinctive sites in subregions of Barossa and Eden Valley. Jason's winemaking style is meticulous and precise but also non-invasive, and focused on purity of fruit and expression of site. Fermentations are native, or "wild," whole cluster use and foot stomping are common, and the wines are unfiltered and unfiltered. Use of oak is subtle and alcohols are often under 14%.



2015 Schwarz "META" Shiraz Barossa Valley South Australia (\$19.99) A bright, fresh, refined style of Shiraz, this shows floral tones, spicy berries, clove, white pepper and chopped herbs. Medium-bodied, with blackberry and plum flavors, it has vibrant acidity and some leafy elements that add an interesting, savory nuance. Smells, feels and tastes more like cooler climate Syrah but the core of dark fruit is all Barossa. **95 JH**

2016 Schwarz "META" Grenache Barossa Valley South Australia (\$19.99) I've often maintained that Grenache is like Pinot Noir on performance-enhancing drugs, and the META is a perfect example of what I mean. Made with almost 90% whole cluster fermentation and

very light extraction, this is a delicate, perfumed, vibrant expression of the grape, focusing more on aromatic lift and freshness than ripeness, weight and power. Translucent in the glass, this is a wine that packs a punch despite its light color—probably has something to do with the 75- to 90-year-old vines from Bethany and Marananga. It weighs in at just 13% ABV. Try with roast chicken. **90 JH**

2015 Schwarz "Nitschke Block" Shiraz Barossa Valley South Australia (\$24.99) A spectacular expression capturing everything that makes Barossa special while avoiding its potential pitfalls. From a single block of vines planted by Jason's father in 1968. The fruit profile is deep, dark and earthy with some cocoa nibs and charred spices. A full-bodied wine but one with poise and balance. The very fine tannin structure is perked up by the 25% whole cluster fermentation. **95 JH**

2015 Schwarz "Thiele Road Block" Grenache Barossa Valley South Australia (\$24.99) A wine that could start an obsession with Grenache. Hauntingly aromatic with exotic red berry fruits, crushed ripe raspberry, Asian spice, garrigue, fennel and scorched earth. Coming from vines planted in 1941, the luxurious texture of the fruit and effortless concentration on the palate is simply stunning. Silky, flowing and quaffable. Reminds me very much of Domaine de Marcoux's Châteauneuf-du-Pape Vieilles Vignes (a perennial favorite splurge wine) with its exotic, lavish expression of Grenache. Again, a simply stunning value with our winery-direct relationship. **92 JH**

In New Zealand, the South Island is Pinot Noir Central

By Kirk Walker

When most people think of Pinot Noir from New Zealand they think of Central Otago—and if they don't, they should. More than three-quarters of the vineyards there are planted to Pinot Noir. It is the coolest region in the country, and on a side note, the southernmost wine region in the world. It is also home to most of the hillside vineyards in the country. The schist and loess-based soils along with the cool, dry climate make it an almost perfect place to practice organic viticulture, and that is just what they do at Carrick Winery. Located in Bannockburn, they make some of the purest, most texturally pleasurable wines in the area, and they are also reasonably priced. Take their **2016 Carrick "Unravalled" Pinot Noir Bannockburn Central Otago (\$19.99)**. This could be one of the best introductions to this region that I have had in several years. The nose is classic Central Otago, dark cherry and that wild thyme herbal note. It is seamless, gliding all too easily across the palate, yet does not lack focus. An open bottle will soon be an empty bottle. Easily the best quality-to-price Pinot at K&L.



Small but not to be overlooked, Corofin Winery produces wines of finesse and transparency that are, while I am loathe to use the word "Burgundian," as or more rewarding than many comparably priced French wines—and easier to justify! The **2015 Corofin "Cowley Vineyard – Main Slopes" Pinot Noir Marlborough (\$29.99)** is grown in the Southern Valleys region of Marlborough where some of the most interesting Marlborough Pinots come from. The mix of soils and the cooler, drier climate give the varietal more depth, texture and complexity. Just one sniff and you can see how special it is: blueberries and strawberries with a floral lift and the most delicate spice and mineral tones. It is a structured wine (perhaps Burgundian?), with high acid and framing tannins. The long finish plays out with darker red berries and black fruits that dance along with fine dusting minerals and crushed herbs. This is a wine that requests a little more effort on the drinker's side: a few hours of decanting are welcome; medium-term cellaring is appreciated; and an appropriate food pairing. All will be well worth it.



Fable Mountain: Poking the Sleeping Giant

By Brian Fogarty

Fairy tales seem to always bring together competing interests for a crescendo moment that turns out happily ever after in the end. Not only is Fable Mountain Winery's name a whimsical designate, but their tale brings together heavyweight characters to a place of sheer majestic beauty—with a little danger thrown in!

Once upon a time, a wayward Screaming Eagle investor from California joined forces with a prestigious assistant winemaker from Mullineux Winery (highly esteemed and a K&L favorite!) at the edge of an African wildlife preserve complete with snakes, baboons, and leopards. Together they set out to organically grow Rhône varieties in the cold shadow of a craggy mountain while the dangers of the animals around them threaten their biodynamic farm's sheep and cows that graze between the vines. And the crescendo moment of this epic tale for K&L readers: Fable Mountain is changing distributors and we were able to secure the last of their highly praised 2013 reds at a 40% discount!

Fun and games aside, the wines are remarkable because of the terroir footprint they have in the Western Cape region of Tulbagh (adjacent to Swartland and two hours from Cape Town). Their property is literally in the shadow of the Witzenberg Mountains (looking like three sleeping giants on the label), so every morning these high elevation vineyards do not see direct sunlight till mid-day, keeping them cool and abbreviating their growing season. This unique geographical feature allows them to have a slow ripening and maintain fresh acidity for an elegant fruit profile. Their 32 hectares of vineyard are planted exclusively to Syrah, Mourvèdre and Grenache. To further

amplify what nature has given them the team cultivates the land with biodynamic practices, using animals in the vineyard to mow, aerate and fertilize the fields naturally in the winter months. However, every night the cows, sheep and "one ugly pig" have to be herded back into the barn to protect them from the wild things lurking in the adjacent wilderness refuge. Partnering so closely with Mother Nature has its risks and its rewards!

2013 Fable Mountain "Tulbagh Estate" Syrah Western Cape (\$29.99)

Sold elsewhere for \$50! Steven Tanzer in *Vinous*: "Dark berry and violet flavors show terrific energy and definition, with pepper and herb notes providing additional lift. A touch of smoked meat adds another dimension but this wine stands out most for its terrific purity of fruit, inner-mouth perfume and building, subtle length." **92 VN, 90 JS**

2013 Fable Mountain "Night Sky" GSM Coastal Region (\$19.99)

Elsewhere \$35! Steven Tanzer: "Sexy scents of dark raspberry, boysenberry, mocha, spices and dried flowers. Concentrated and suave, with dark raspberry, pepper and spice flavors offering lovely inner-mouth energy and perfume. Finishes with a firm but fine dusting of tannins and lovely lift and length. Precise, youthful wine with a light touch and a bright future." **90 VN, 90 JS**





Payten & Jones: Winery-Direct from the Hidden Yarra

By David Driscoll

This past February I took my first trip Down Under to work on a gin project with Yarra Valley distillers Four Pillars. While I was there primarily in my role as spirits buyer, I have a great personal and working relationship with our Aussie expert Ryan Woodhouse (now heading up Domestic) and he gave me full permission to shop for K&L on his behalf. I wasn't in Healesville for more than a few hours when I ran into two winemakers who wanted to show me their vineyards in the hills above town. After catching a few gin and tonics, I hopped in the car with a guy named Behn Payten, a friend of my buddies at Four Pillars.

Located just outside of Healesville behind one of the Yarra's highest peaks, Payten's original house perished in what's referred to as "Black Saturday" in the Yarra—the wildfires that savaged the region's hillsides and killed more than 170 people back in February 2009. Having talked with a number of folks in the area, it's clear the tragedy is still fresh in their minds and the blackened trees that still scatter the region are a stark reminder. "After the fire a lot of outside money came in to help rebuild," Behn told me. "When they rebuilt the infrastructure it was better than before. There was more awareness at that point and today we're stronger because of it. Before then we tried to make Pinot Noir like Burgundy and Cabernet like in Bordeaux, but today we understand what Yarra is and how the fruit responds in turn."

Joined by his daughter Pia, we crept beneath a tarp meant to keep out local pests. "We get kangaroos here and loads of wombats," he said with a chuckle. I was dying to run into one, I told him. "We'll keep an eye out," he replied. "They'll be here by dusk." In addition to his estate selections, Behn is making a vibrant Grenache and a solera-aged Sangiovese that about knocked my socks off. The wines are modern in their expressiveness, but classic in their restraint. In essence, they represent a style currently embraced by a number of forward-thinking Yarra producers: wines made to drink in their youth, but with complexity and elegance.

After seven months of waiting for paperwork and shipping arrangements, we've brought the Payten & Jones wines directly to K&L and I'm absolutely stoked. Ryan and I were practically grinning like kids on Christmas morning while tasting through the new arrivals. The wines of Payten & Jones are a pure passion project for us here at K&L—we don't have all that much, they're not going to make anyone rich, but they're what we are interested in drinking ourselves.

Twisting off the cap on the **2016 Payten & Jones "Valley Vignerons" Chardonnay Yarra Valley (\$19.99)** brought me right back to those vineyards. The wines of the Yarra Valley are the perfect middle ground between California and Burgundy, in that there's more fruit than, say, a young bottle of Chassagne-Montrachet, but more freshness and minerality than a typical Napa expression. The Payten & Jones Chardonnays are zippy and clean, but they're never tart or citric. For the price, they're a big step up from what we generally see in that range from both California and France.

The same goes for the reds. We cracked the **2016 Payten & Jones "Valley Vignerons" Pinot Noir Yarra Valley (\$19.99)** and it had plenty of fleshy berry flavor, but balanced by a vibrant acidity and hints of spice and earth. There's a terroir-driven quality to the wine.

Did it show notes of kangaroo and wombat? No, although as the sun went down that day the "critters" Behn spoke of did come out. It's not often you get to drink dynamic bottles of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay while observing a family of kangaroos in the wild, but that's part of the Yarra's inherent charm.



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