

the bullionaire

BULLION 14A

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Wines from the Southern Hemisphere, well sort of!

When I started my discussions with Stuart Knox of Fix St James, we toyed with the idea of a Southern Hemisphere selection. We do have a focus on imported wines with our sommeliers and this is a conscious decision on our behalf. It is pretty easy to buy decent Australian wines in Australia, but it is bloody hard to find great wines that are worth the money, be they imported or Australian.

The major retailers have a large selection of Aussie wines at all price levels, and it is easy to buy cheap Italian and Spanish wines and the sea of NZ Sauvignon Blanc out there. (On a side note, there is a name for this sea – The Sauv-Alanche.) It is also pretty easy to buy the high end / prestige wines. But the imported wines and the high quality local wines that are excellent examples of their style and region, well these wines are mainly sold through restaurants.

This is our niche and our unique selling point, so we will continue to select these hard to find wines with the Sommeliers we work with.

That being said, a few of our members have suggested we look at a more Aussie pack, hence the Southern Hemisphere idea. We almost succeeded too!

In this pack we have two wines from Australia – a great Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon and an elegant Barossa Shiraz. (Yes they are being made). We then have a Malbec from Mendoza in Argentina, and a Riesling from Oregon. We know that Oregon is not in the Southern hemisphere, but it is from a vineyard that is owned and planted by Australian winemaking royalty so we thought it was OK to include.

For those not familiar with Stuart Knox of Fix St James, he was voted “Sommelier of the Year” a few years back and his wine bar in the centre of Sydney has become a bit a mecca



Vistalba Winery, Mendoza Argentina

and hangout for the wine industry. He supports plenty of young winemakers and his list is always interesting, compelling and a little confronting. It has something for everyone.

First up from Stuart is the oddity of the Southern Hemisphere, the **2008 Tunkalilla Riesling from Oregon in the USA**. This is owned by Brian Croser of Petaluma and Tapanappa fame.

Brian Croser is almost the grand daddy of the Australian Wine industry. He probably does not want to hear that, but he is one of the few winemakers left from the new wave of wineries back in 70's and 80's. There have been a few hiccups along the way, with hostile takeovers and new ventures but he is currently on a different level to most of his contemporaries. I first tasted this Riesling in a mixed pack that Tapanappa put together for Xmas. I am on their mailing list and take up their offers from time to time. It included all of their big guns, and this amazing wine from

Oregon. When Stuart raised this wine as a possible contender, I had just finished drinking the wine with my wife the night before, and I was planning to call the winery to pick up an extra case. Well as they say in the classics, I made that call, but ended up purchasing the last of the 2008 vintage for Bullion Cellars. A great example of a Riesling with a bit of age and why the industry has fallen in love with this style.

The first of the red wines is from Argentina. **2012 Vistalba Corte C – Malbec/Cabernet Sauvignon – Mendoza Argentina**. We have always wanted to re-visit Argentina as the wines out of this country are just getting better and better. They are a major wine producer (the 5th largest), so if the wines from this country are not on your radar, then you need to get a new radar. Argentina is all about red wines and Malbec in particular.

Malbec in Argentina is a very different beast than

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SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES...



2012 VISTALBA CORTE C – MALBEC/CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Mendoza Argentina

Mendoza is the largest and best known of the regions in Argentina and is broken down into many regions and sub regions. In a small area called VistAlba within Luyan de Coyo, Stuart has found an amazing wine from one of the most distinguished winemakers in the country.

Carlos Pulenta has a long and distinguished history in Mendoza, being the former CEO of one the largest wineries in the area. He finished his ultra modern, gravity fed winery in 2005 and it is a thing of wonder; full of marble, slate, polished concrete and dark woods. Almost instantly, it became the flagship estate of Mendoza, where he follows the Bordeaux model of creating sophisticated blends, but using Malbec as the base. He chose this site with a lot of care, as his father planted the vineyard back in 1948.

He owns 53 hectares around the winery, 80% of which are the Malbec vines planted by his father (the rest is newly planted Malbec, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon). He also has a restaurant at the winery, La Bourgogne which is considered one of Argentina's finest.

The 2012 Corte C is a blend of 80% Malbec and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is aged for 12 months in French, medium toasted oak (20% new) which is then stored in bottle for another 6 months before release. This is a ripe juicy wine, with dark fruits that almost leap out of the glass. The wine is in your face, but in a nice way. Oak is subtle, but it supports the fruit, which is what this wine is all about.

The palate is full of dark fruits with enticing aromas of berries and black pepper. It finishes with soft and round tannins with great length and structure.

The winery also produces a Corte A and Corte B, which are considerably more expensive and well worth the effort to track down if you want to try one of Mendoza's flagship wines, but for our money the Corte C is the one to drink. Amazing quality and value.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Malbec's traditional accompaniment in Argentina is a steak of grass-fed beef cooked over an open flame, seared quickly and served with chimichurri sauce, a combination that typically includes parsley, coriander, garlic, olive oil and vinegar. This pairing plays to Malbec's robust, spicy character. You can also match with other red meats as well, including lamb and game.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes – this wine can be cellared for the next 2-3 years, however I will be enjoying the upfront fruit, tannins and structure over the next 6 months. No need to cellar.



2008 TUNKALILLA RIESLING *Willamette Valley Oregon USA*

Brian Croser started the South Australian winery Petaluma in 1976, with the idea of planting the variety that was best suited to a particular region. Hence he planted Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in Coonawarra, Riesling in the Clare Valley and Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the Adelaide Hills. Today this sounds like the most natural thing to do, but back in the 1970's it was revolutionary. Traditionally, Australians planted every conceivable vine variety in the one vineyard, and wondered why most of them made ordinary wine.

In 2001 he experienced a hostile takeover of Petaluma which left a rather bitter taste in his mouth. This has thankfully been put behind him, as in 2003 he linked up with Bordeaux luminary Jean-Michel Cazes, of Château Lynch-Bages fame and his old Petaluma shareholder, Bollinger, in a new multi-regional, multi-national, ultra-premium wine company called Tapanappa. These wines are pretty amazing. They are quite expensive, but all are sourced from single vineyard sites and in my humble opinion, worth every cent.

The wine from Brian Croser that Stuart has chosen is a Riesling from Oregon in the US. Yes his empire extends over to the US, and whilst Oregon has more of a reputation for Pinot Noir, this Riesling is pretty special.

Tunkalilla Vineyard is a tiny Riesling vineyard perched on the southern facing escarpment of the Eola Hills in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. In 2005, Brian and Ann Croser planted 3 acres of Riesling on a then 50-acre Christmas tree farm. Brian has a long association with Oregon, helping to create Argyle Wines in the 1980's. (One of the standout producers of the area).

The 2008 is the first vintage from this vineyard and boy is it good. Riesling is my

favourite variety and this wine is a great example of why! Gorgeous aromatics that are almost floral, but with accents of lime, flint and this amazing mineral like shell character. If you concentrate, you can discern the off-dry levels of residual sugar, but that will miss the point. This wine is in total balance and succeeds in its goal of creating a dry table wine of incredible complexity and structure. For those wine nerds out there it has an acid level of 9.6 gpl (grams per litre) and a residual sugar of 8.6gpl, which in separate wines would be high, but in this wine all you get is balance and structure.

The wine shows spice and toast nuances of its age (remember it is almost 6 years old) and it has tangy apple flavours at the core with this incredible mineral grip and acidity that carries the wine a long way.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Rieslings are known for their balance of acidity and sugar. It's the acidity that allows it to handle such a variety of difficult pairing partners. This acid allows the wine to handle some of the tangy flavours of ginger and lime in most Asian foods, whilst pairing it with a simple grilled fish is a match made in heaven. I really like to match it with a more oily fish like ocean trout or salmon, as this more full bodied style of wine can easily handle the strong flavours of these fishes.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This wine is 6 years old, so you do not need to cellar. Drink over the next 3-6 months and if you want some more, give us a call and we might have some left. Of course this wine will last another 2-3 years, but don't bother- drink it now.



2011 IPSO FACTO CABERNET SAUVIGNON *Margaret River*

The first vineyard planted in the Margaret River was in 1967 by Vasse Felix, which is now owned by the Holmes a Court family. Ever since, it has been at the fore front of quality winemaking in Australia, with a kind of rock star mentality and an ego to match. Plenty of money and vanity projects have been thrown at this coastal town, funded by the mining money that always seems to slosh around the state. But you cannot deny the high quality of the wine. It also is a surfing mecca, with tourism a major focus.

It is into this landscape that Ipsos Facto finds itself with a Cabernet from the great 2011 vintage. In the major winemaking areas of South Australia, 2011 was a disaster - very cold and wet. Over in the west it was the complete opposite. A very warm and dry year, resulting in an early vintage but of very high quality, similar to 2007. There is an agreement from every winery and wine expert that Cabernet Sauvignon from 2011 is outstanding.

Ipsos Facto is a side project for Kate Morgan, the winemaker of Fraser Gallop, whose employers have kindly allowed her to branch out so to speak fulfilling her dream to make her own wine under her own label. This dream started in 2010 focusing on two wines (Cabernet Sauvignon and Chenin Blanc) she likes to keep things nice and simple. This will likely be the last Ipsos Facto wine you will see from us for a while, unless of course Kate decides to launch another wine. Chardonnay anyone? Speaking of Chardonnay, Margaret River produces some excellent Chardonnay, but they also tend to be a little expensive. These are not the lean cool climate wines that are all the rage now. But they are a style that I love and definitely should be part of your wine drinking adventures.

The 2011 vintage is from the Wallcliffe sub-region within the Margaret River, planted over gravelly loam soils. Kate uses minimalist winemaking techniques of wild yeast fermentation in open fermenters during an extended maceration period (about 30 days). It is then transferred into older oak barrels for malolactic fermentation (A process in which the tart tasting malic acid, naturally present in wine, is converted to softer-tasting lactic acid) The wine is then racked and left in the barrels for a further 15 months, before being bottled without filtration. Kate only produced 120 cases of this wine. This is a wine that you can enjoy now or cellar for the next 6 years. Blackcurrant and eucalypt flavours explode over the nose and palate. This is an elegant wine that is all about contemplation. It has a length and a complexity that I just love.

FOOD MATCHINGS

A young Cabernet Sauvignon loves grilled dishes and other red meats. You want to look at things with a high fat content. The full body of a Cabernet Sauvignon also loves 'thick' dishes like hearty beef stews. Although Cabernet Sauvignon does not love fish, if you wanted to be adventurous you could serve this wine with a pepper crusted grilled tuna steak, the pairing would be bloody great.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant this wine for 20 minutes before serving. You can safely cellar this wine for the next 4-6 years. The winemaker thinks 8, but I don't think I could, or would want, to wait that long.



2012 SOUL GROWERS, SLOW GROWN SHIRAZ *Barossa Valley*

Soul Growers is small operation and the work of four good mates; David Cruickshank, Paul Heinicke and the Lindner brothers of Langmeil fame, James and Paul. Together they share almost 80 years wine industry experience, but what is most important for them is that they have access to some great vineyard material. Paul Heinicke, who is the driving force behind this small label sums it up best "Slow Grown has multiple meanings for us, particularly with our flagship Shiraz. - it takes time to make great wine - from vineyard selection, oak selection, winemaking techniques and blending the right mix of vineyards depending on the year. It also has reference to enjoying the wine now or ageing for 7-10 years. Our first vintage was 2004 and every vintage is still drinking very well."

They are old school artisanal winemakers, with wines made in small parcels, using open fermentation techniques and old basket presses. They use no fining and filtration when it comes to bottling. The Slow Grown Shiraz is their flagship wine, from the great 2012 vintage. Only 200 cases were made of this wine, so we are overjoyed to include it our selection.

The 2012 is a modern take on the Barossa. It is sourced from both the cooler Eden Valley and the warmer Barossa. The wine spends 2 years in oak but where these guys are smart is that they have throttled back on new American oak which represents only 10% of the blend. There is 20% new French Oak with the balance in older oak. What this means is that the wine is not overpowered by the oak and it compliments rather than dominates the fruit. It also gives the wine more elegance and freshness, avoiding the raisiny/ jammy/ stewed fruit that characterised the wines of the 1990's.

Don't worry it is still a big, full bodied wine, but there is no way you would describe this wine as a brute. Thankfully it is made for drinking now, so there is no need to put it down for 10 years. The wine is very dark and vibrant in colour. The nose is lifted and perfumed, with spicy fresh fruit which carries onto the palate of rich plum and berry characters. The palate is complemented by subtle, but high quality oak adding a depth of flavour and an elegant mouthfeel.

If more Barossa Wines tasted like this, there would be more bottles in my cellar.

FOOD MATCHINGS

The classic food match with a sturdy Barossa Valley Shiraz is a flame grilled fillet of beef accompanied with a red wine jus, but also goes great with a hearty lamb stew, wood-fired pizza or a char-grilled vegetable paella with Mediterranean spices for the vegetarians out there.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

You will need to decant the wine for around 20 minutes before opening, but this wine is no beast. You could safely cellar for the next 3-5 years but I think the wine will really be in the zone in the next 12 months, where it will show plenty of power and fruit, but with an underlying elegance. Remember you want a lot of fruit and power when you drink this wine, as that is what Barossa Shiraz is all about.

ABOUT THE SOMMELIER



Stuart Knox – What you need to know

Stuart grew up in Coffs Harbour, moving to Sydney to study. Like a lot of students he found himself working in the hospitality industry. During this time he worked in a variety of catering companies, restaurants and hotels. Followed by 2 years at The Observatory Hotel.

Late 1998 saw Stuart move to London for the ubiquitous back packing holiday but instead he was offered a position as Assistant Sommelier at Sir Terrance Conran's first restaurant Bibendum. On his return in 2001 he commenced as Sommelier with Dietmar Sawyere at Forty One Restaurant, within 18 months

Stuart had also taken over the reigns as Restaurant Manager.

September 2005 saw Stuart go out on his own, first opening Fix @ Castlereagh, a lobby espresso bar then going on to open Fix St James in January 2007.

Fix St James is a 50 seat CBD restaurant with a focus on the freshest produce, cooked honestly and a 250 bottle strong wine list, with a focus on small handcrafted wines from around the globe.

In September 2011 Stuart was awarded the Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide Sommelier of the Year.

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those grown in France and the rest of world; they are riper, fruitier and fleshier. In France, the best Malbecs can be found in the Cahors, where it can be quite decadent, but in Bordeaux it has fallen out of favour as it can be very difficult to grow. In Australia and the US it is mainly used as small components in Bordeaux style blends - but it is rarely found on its own. In Argentina it is the star, and Vistalba is a show piece winery in the heart of Mendoza. An amazing wine from an amazing producer.

The last two wines are all Australian. **The 2011 Ipso Facto Cabernet Sauvignon from Margaret River.** This is the second Ipso Facto wine we have included in our packs, which is a little unusual for us. But Kate Morgan must be doing something right, otherwise two different sommeliers would not be extolling her virtues. When I did the tasting with Stuart and we were discussing the previous selection by Dan Sharp and the Chenin Blanc, he asked me if I had tasted the Cabernet Sauvignon. I had not! Well he has this wine on his list and he opened a bottle for us to taste. It blew me away and as we were looking for two Aussie wines in this pack, we knew this wine would be one of them. From a great new producer and one of the best vintages in recent memory, it was a no brainer. If you like Cabernet Sauvignon rich and full of flavour you will love this wine. Plenty of blackcurrant and eucalyptus flavours, framed by toasty oak.

The second Aussie wine is the **2012 Soul Growers, Slow Grown Shiraz – Barossa Valley.** We have tended to stay away from Barossa Shiraz at Bullion Cellars, but I think we may have been a bit harsh. Since the early 1990's the Barossa winemakers have followed the "wine on steroids" mantra. They produced wines that appealed to a few key wine critics in the US (Robert Parker and Wine Spectator) and the people who religiously purchased any wine that scored 95 points and above. A seemingly endless number of wines from old growth Barossa vines were picked at incredibly high ripeness levels, then aged in 100% new American oak for over 2 years. These wines were then tasted from the oak barrels by these same journalists, who gave their scores of 95-99 and the wines promptly sold out.

Thankfully for the rest of us, these journalist are starting to lose their appeal as customers realised these wines were great to taste but pretty lousy to drink. Plus those really high scoring wines from the later 1990's

have in most cases completely fallen over and today are tasting very tired and flat.

Spring forward to the past few years and the Barossa is now making Shiraz that people want to drink, or at least wines that our sommeliers are wanting to drink. Don't get too worried though, the wines are still big, full bodied styles, but now they will not strangle you as you drink a glass with your food.

The Slow Grown Shiraz is the flagship wine of Soul Growers, with only 200 cases made from the 2012 vintage. We were lucky to get our hands on this wine as it is allocated and normally sells for \$50 a bottle. However we happen to know the owner, so were able to be extra persuasive after Stuart selected the wine. We had a stall opposite Soul Brothers at a wine show last year and over a few days of tastings we got to know each other pretty well. A few restaurants and US importers will have to miss out this 2012 vintage, but hey I think we are more important- don't you?

So there you go 4 wines with a definite Southern Hemisphere slant, and all wines that are a joy to drink.

Enjoy – Matt the Bullionaire



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan – Bullion Cellars



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