

the bullionaire

BULLION 150

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Back to the future

I love working with Kim Bickley on her Sommelier Selections. Despite the fact she no longer works in a restaurant, she is still regarded as one of the top sommeliers in the country and a favourite on the wine show judging circuit. Her palate and knowledge of wines is incredible and it is a joy to sit down and talk with her about wine. There is an intellectual bent to her thinking that I really enjoy. I always feel a little smarter after our tastings and discussions.

Our sommelier selections are never really about big burly wines; however Kim has chosen 4 wines that really do make a statement. There are no wimpy wines here; but on the flip side the wines all show elegance, precision and class. One, I would have to say, is the best wine I have drunk all year. I won't tell you which one, for it doesn't really matter what I, or anyone else likes. We want to instil in you a confidence and knowledge not to be swayed by other people's opinions. We want you to be the sommelier at your next dinner party and to have the confidence and knowledge to order the wines at your favourite restaurant. I will give you a hint though; it comes in a dark bottle.

The white wine in our Sommelier selections is always a personal highlight. If a white wine is above \$30, there is generally a pretty good reason. It will always be a wine of great quality and real distinction. The fact that it is a Riesling (my favourite variety) certainly doesn't hurt. The 2013 Valere Riesling is from a relatively unknown region called Mansfield, which is a small sub region within Victoria's Upper Goulburn wine region. It is strange to see a winemaker from one of the most famous wineries in the Yarra Valley, known for its Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, starting their own label and focusing on Riesling. However when you look into the matter a little closer it makes a lot of sense.

Dominic Valentine, one of the senior winemakers at Oakridge, has worked a number of vintages in the Rheingau of Germany, working at the top estates of Weingut Josef Leitz and Weingut Robert Weil. This opened his eyes to how magnificent this noble variety can be. In his words, Valere was conceived, "to keep in touch and keep fresh the lessons learnt in Germany".

He has been schooled in making the typical Australian style of Riesling, with his earlier stint at Mitchelton, but what he witnessed in Germany turned his understanding on its head. There, they generally have long, slow pressing cycles to maximise the skin contact; minimal sulphur usage; they carry out oxidative handling of the juice, with no refrigeration, plus fermentation and maturation in large format, older oak. Very different than what you see in Australia. In fact the complete opposite!



The great thing about this wine is that it has the structure, complexity and length you associate with the wines from Rheingau, yet with the distinctive lime and citrus characters of Australia. Very impressive and very drinkable!

For Kim's first red wine she has gone back to the future. Back in 2012 Kim chose a fantastic Village level Cote Du Rhone, so it only seemed fitting that three years later we would take a look at the next vintage. The 2010 Domaine les Hautes Cances, Cairanne, Cotes du Rhone "Cuvee Tradition" has a long name, but well worth remembering. It is drinking in the zone right now and we managed to take the last stocks in Australia; stealing it from Mr Wong's in Sydney, who were pouring it in their premium wine by the glass program. Their loss, our gain!

The wines from the Rhone are elegant and powerful at the same time. Whilst the generic Coté Du Rhone wines are good, it is when they get into the village level that they get really interesting. These are Grenache based wines that reach their apex with the famed and expensive wines of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. This wine is from the village of Carianne in the northern sector of the Cotes du Rhone, near the village of Gigondas. At a fraction of the price of most Chateau-neuf-du-pape and better than many, this is a great way to experience one of the great wine growing regions on the planet.

This wine is not heavy or over-ripe. It is just the perfect glass of red wine. I would have to say its sophistication is what sets it apart. It has these amazing black fruit and liquorice characters swirling around the glass and before you know, you are opening the second bottle.

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bullion CELLARS
SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES



2013 VALERE RIESLING MANSFIELD *Victoria*

Sourced from the Barwite Vineyard planted in 1998 on a slope facing the Broken River; situated 10 minutes east of Mansfield in Victoria's Upper Goulburn wine region. Dominic Valentine's personal label has been modelled on the great Riesling wines of Germany.

Dominic looks for the lemon/lime flavour parameters in the grapes prior to picking, with some more developed characters creeping in. Riesling can hang on the vines a little longer than other white varieties, so as long as botrytis is not present, everything is fine. The vineyard is situated at semi-alpine altitudes so it's very cold late in the season, hence a minimal risk of botrytis.

The handpicked fruit is crushed and then pressed pretty hard to 2/3 stainless steel tanks and 1/3 old French oak puncheons (Large barrels') and allowed to spontaneously ferment. It is a bit unusual to use old oak in making Riesling in Australia, more of a German influence. This, Dominic believes, adds the level of complexity and structure so evident in the wine. Continual monitoring was undertaken to ensure the balance of the wine, but as Valentine told us, the wine "is not about technical numbers... but rather wishing to create a balanced wine. It's all about the palate and perception."

Boy has he achieved his goal. This wine is just beautiful. Only 220 cases were produced and it has the typical Riesling lemon / lime characters wrapped up by a texture which coats the palate. No doubt from the time spent in old French oak. It has some lively slatey and mineral characters, with a cloudy apple juice type flavour, with an ever so slightly chalky finish. Chill it down and don't be surprised at how quickly the bottle disappears.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Asian dishes, seafood dishes or just by itself. As Kim said, a sign of a good wine is if she would buy a six pack herself. Well she brought a case.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Can be enjoyed now, but cellar for the next 3-5 years with ease.



2010 DOMAINE LES HAUTES CANCES, CAIRANNE, COTES DU RHONE, "CUVEE TRADITION" *France*

Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan

Kim chose the 2009 vintage of this wine back in 2012. We both loved the wine then and the 2010 vintage is step up in quality.

The story of Domaine les Hautes Cances is of a small family-run estate located in the village of Cairanne in the northern sector of the Cotes du Rhone, near the village of Gigondas. The vineyards are managed using organic principles and yields are deliberately kept low so as to express the true terroir of the region. Another reason for the great quality of wines is the age of their vines. These low yielding vines have an average age of 48 years, with several plots reaching the grand old age of 100. They can thank their grandfather for this critical vineyard resource.

The wine is a blend of 42% Grenache (from vines more than 100 years old), Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignan and Cinsault. The fruit is hand harvested, hand selected and completely destemmed. This is the first wine to be produced in the brand new gravity fed winery built by the Astarts. Gone are the big old foudres of yester year — the wines are now brighter and finer as a result. All wines are bottled on the Estate and are unfiltered.

Bright purple in colour. Prominent aromas of blackberry, liquorice, smoked meat and violet. Tangy acidity gives the wine shape, highlighted by juicy black and blue fruit flavours. Finishes broad and spicy, with firm tannins, and a meaty quality and good length.

Very, very good!

FOOD MATCHINGS

This elegant silky wine is perfect for long slow cooked roasts of pork or lamb that may even be a little bit fatty (shoulder of lamb and lamb shanks, for example). It suits stews with dark, winey sauces too. Can also be matched with most tomato based Italian dishes.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

The 2010 vintage was a cracker in the Rhone and this wine has another 5-8 years. Decant before serving for at least 20 minutes.

2012 TIKAL PATRIORTA *Mendoza Argentina - Malbec (60%) Bonarda (40%)*



Ernesto Catena, is the eldest son of Nicolás Catena of Catena Zapata fame. A 4th generation winemaker, he is defined by many as the “bohemian” side of the Catena family. Ernesto is a tireless and avid reader, painter, art collector, horseman, polo player and archer. But first and foremost he has wine and grapes in his blood.

Ernesto Catena named this particular wine “Patriota” (Patriot) since Bonarda and Malbec grapes have remained at the core of Argentina’s great winemaking tradition. Plus it is a pretty cool name. The original artwork of this passionate dancing couple was created by Ernesto’s close friend and artist, Ariel Mlynarzewicz. (We also have no idea how to pronounce Ariel’s last name).

The grapes are from his Bio Dynamic vineyard in the Vista Flores, Uco Valley and La Vendimia in Lujan de Cuyo. Two different sub regions of Mendoza. Both vineyards are well over 1000 metres. It is a blend of 60% Malbec and 40% Bonarda. They are hand harvested and aged 12 months in 70% French & 30% American oak (30% new). This wine is very impressive; not only does it look great, but what is in the glass is pretty amazing. I can see why it has scored so high with critics.

It has a rich flavour profile, packed with concentrated blackberries, dark plums and mocha, featuring plenty of dark chocolate notes. It just rolls around the palate, offering extra layers of complexity and flavours as it goes. Oak is prominent but the fruit can handle it with ease. A pretty complete wine, it is muscular and powerful, but also offers elegance and complexity.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Red meat and steak, and if you want to be adventurous, red meat and steak. On a serious side, you can match this wine with grilled meats such as beef and pork and even pizza with meat toppings. Incredibly fun to drink!

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 30 minutes before serving. Can be cellared for the next 3-8 years.

2013 BENMARCO *Malbec Mendoza Argentina*



Susana Balbo is the dynamic presence behind one of the best wineries in Argentina. In 2012, she was recognized as one of the “Most influential women wine-makers” by The Drink Business magazine. Plus, in 2015 she was awarded “Woman of the Year” by the same magazine. She is also running for the President of Argentina. Not sure where she finds the time.

BenMarco Malbec is harvested from the Vista Flores terroir in the Uco Valley of Mendoza, from a single vineyard at 1,110 metres above sea level. The vineyard is 26 year old vines. It was hand harvested and after a 30 day maceration, was transferred into 1-3 year old French oak for 11 months. It underwent complete malolatic fermentation.

It has a beautiful deep purple colour with perfumed aromas of ripe red fruits and roasted coffee beans. It is lush, full bodied and penetrating on the palate with

loads of chewy, currant jam flavours, bright acidity, and a touch of grip on the almost savoury finish. This wine really unfolds with some air so try not to slurp it down in a rush, and it shows why the Argentine people are in love with Malbec.

FOOD MATCHINGS

This wine is a little softer and rounder than the Tikal. It pairs well with a wide range of foods including steak, beef, grilled pork, veal, medium-strong cheeses, and meat-based pasta sauces.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 30 minutes before serving. Can be cellared for the next 3-7 years.

MENDOZA, IT IS ALL ABOUT ALTITUDE

Increased altitude means decreased temperature and increased solar radiation. In most of the world’s wine regions, grape growing stops at around 1000 metres: past this, it just gets too cold to properly ripen grapes. In Mendoza, the average altitude of the vineyards is a heady 900 metres, with many well above 1000 metres (in fact, the highest vineyards in the world are found in Argentina, in Salta, at just over 3000 metres).

If you were expecting small vineyards on incredibly steeped vineyards then you would be wrong. The reality is that all the vineyards look pretty flat and they are pretty big. A vineyard at 800 metres looks pretty much the same as one at 1,400 metres. This is because the gain in altitude is very gradual, with a plateau that leads to the Andes Mountain range. This mountain range forms a vital role in winemaking in Mendoza. It creates a rain shadow over the area, meaning very little rainfall, but at the same time, the snow melt provides an abundance of crystal clear water, which combined with advanced irrigation systems, allows the vineyards to be there in the first place. You see Mendoza is basically a desert.

Due to the high altitude there is a large difference in diurnal temperatures. (Basically the difference between the day time and night time temperature). This is important as heat is required to ripen the grapes and tannins, but too hot and the acidity and structure in the wine all but disappears.

This is the reason for the different wines styles in warm and cool climate regions. Regions with a high diurnal temperature claim to have the best of both worlds. The high temperature during the day increases the colour and aroma intensity and ripens the fruit. The low temperature at night allows for added natural acidity and freshness in the wine. With increased altitude, the intensity of the sunlight increases. The sunlight intensity in the high altitude vineyards has a great effect on the aromatic profile of Malbec. The grape skins in the Malbec from high altitude are thicker, which translates into higher concentration of total tannins and a darker colour in the grapes and the wines. This means that in high altitude Malbecs you have high concentration and structure, with an incredible amount of total tannins but yet, you have soft and round wines.





ABOUT THE SOMMELIER

Kim Bickley is one of the top Sommeliers in the country, previously working at “Hatted” restaurants Glass Basserie and Black by Ezard. She has decided to spend some time on the other side of the counter, working with one of the largest drinks distributor in Australia. She remains an active committee member of Sommeliers Australia NSW chapter.

A CMS Certified Sommelier, who finished in the top eleven students who were certified by the Court of Master Sommeliers in Australia in 2008. Kim is also a wine show judge, a Len Evans and Sommeliers Australia Tutorial Scholar and was the first, of only two Australians in the International ‘Landmark Australia’ Tutorial 2010. She is also active in the education sector, heavily involved in the Wine and Spirit Education Trust.

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Mendoza, Malbec and Argentina. We have had a few wines from Mendoza over the years, but the quality of the two wines Kim has chosen is off the charts. Yes we have two wines from Mendoza. Why? Because they were both so bloody good! It was Kim’s intention to stick with one, but upon tasting both, we could not separate them. We have the 2013 Ben Marco Malbec and the 2012 Tikal Patriota. Both wines are from Mendoza and both are pretty sensational.

Malbec is the star variety in two regions. Cahors in South Western France and Mendoza in Argentina. The wines from Mendoza are more readily available and in my opinion a little more approachable. You have big gutsy wines that are crying out for steak, but the good wines also have the class and elegance you want in fine wines.

Despite the wines both coming from Mendoza there are slight differences. The 2013 Ben Marco is 100% Malbec, whilst the 2012 Tikal Patriota is 60% Malbec and 40% Bonarda. (Bonarda is the second most planted grape in Mendoza, but it is virtually unknown outside its home). Both these wines however show why Mendoza is white hot at the moment and a favourite of sommeliers around the world.

The 2012 Tikal Patriota is the second wine we have taken from the winemaker Ernesto Catena. If you are not familiar with his background, it is a pretty interesting one. Ernesto Catena spent his childhood in the vineyards owned by his father Nicholas Catena, the Godfather of the Argentine wine industry and the person who put the wines of Argentina on the world stage. He experienced a kaleidoscope of cultures when growing up; living in New York, Buenos Aires, Berkeley, Cambridge (MA), Milan and London.

Along the way he earned degrees in Computer Science and Economics, a Master in Design from Milan, and a degree in History from London. Today, he is a skilled horseman (Polo), fashion designer, software developer, book editor and winemaker, pursuing all that gives pleasure in life. He enjoys the tag of playboy and rock star and this hedonism (in the best sense of the word) shows through in the wines. In fact if his wines weren’t so good, you would really hate this guy.

Tikal is named after his son, and through these wines he really pushes the boundaries in Argentina. The Tikal Patriota sources Malbec from his Bio Dynamic vineyard in the sub region of Mendoza called Vistaflores. The Bonarda is from an 80 year old vineyard (which has very low yields) in Eastern-Mendoza (Lujan de Cuyo) which is a little warmer (Bonarda likes the heat). This is right next to the old Catena family homestead. The site is on an ancient river-bed with high mineral content in the soil and I think this really comes through in the wine. This wine was selected No. 46 in the US magazine Wine Spectator’s Top 100 of 2014 and I can see why. This is a rich, juicy red wine, packed with concentrated flavours of blackberry and dark plums, featuring plenty of dark chocolate notes and toasty oak. Utterly delicious!

The 2013 Ben Marco Malbec is made by Susana Balbo, who “Drinks Business Magazine” voted the most powerful woman in the world of wine in 2015. She acts as a consultant wine-maker around the world and is about to run for President in Argentina (crazy but true!). She started her own winery in 1999 where she was able to focus on her own style of wines, after years of being the consultant winemaker of choice in Argentina and around the world. (Including Catena) Dominio del Plata had its humble beginnings in a small rented winery, but it has since gone on to become one of the most recognized and prestigious wineries in Argentina

Susana developed the BenMarco brand as a tribute to the “traditional” Argentine wine style. These wines display strong concentration and express the primary fresh fruit aromas of the grapes. It shows a beautiful, deep purple colour with perfumed aromas of ripe red fruits and roasted coffee beans. It is lush, full-bodied and penetrating on the palate with loads of chewy currant jam flavours, bright acidity, and a touch of grip on the almost savoury finish.

So there you go, four wines I know I will enjoy and hope you will too.

Matt – The Bullionaire