

THE GOLDEN THREAD

IN THIS ISSUE: YOUR WINES, YOUR WINE EXPERT, ALTERNATIVE VARIETIES & BLENDS

A Look at Alternative Varieties and Blends



Whenever I sit down to taste the wines the sommeliers have selected for the next delivery there is always a sense of excitement and eagerness. I am always amazed at the diversity and selection of wines I get to taste. I have been in the industry for over 15 years, thinking I knew a bit about wine, but I now get to taste wine styles I have only read about, but never tried. I am like a kid in a candy store. The great thing about this wine club and the sommeliers we work with is that we will never run out of great wines to show you. In fact we now have a new advertising slogan for those marketing types out there.

“Too many great wines - not enough dinner parties.”

This brings us to Kim Bickley and her selection. Kim is the Head Sommelier for Luke Mangan's restaurants at the Hilton (Glass Brasserie in Sydney and the Gold Coast). For her theme she has chosen to look at alternative varieties and blended wines. We have had a fair bit of

Shiraz and Pinot Noir in the recent dozens, so I was really excited when she told me her idea. Then I tasted the wines, and was completely blown away. Wow.

But before the Wines - A little bit of History!

It is only in the New World (Australia / NZ / US / South America) that we are fascinated with single varietal wines and in fact the variety itself. Throughout Europe the varietal is hardly ever mentioned on the label. The variety is secondary to what they call the “Terroir”. There are whole websites devoted to this topic, but in summary Terroir means that the wine produced is more than just the variety, it is a combination and mixture of the soil, the climate and how this all interacts with the winemaker and the environment. The winemakers know what the varieties are of course, but most of the wines are blends of different grapes, where they view the sum as being greater than parts etc.

So why is it different in the new world? Two words - The French!

Before the 1980's Australia labeled their wines with terms such as Hermitage, Chablis, White Burgundy, Moselle and even Champagne. (Some of you might recall Grange being labeled as Grange Hermitage). These terms were used as the local drinkers didn't know or care about the varieties and the Australian winemakers used well known regions in Europe to describe the wine styles they were making. This was all well and good until the New World started exporting their wines and started to make a lot of noise with the press and then the consumers. (Australia eventually became the number 1 imported wine into the UK.) The French naturally got a bit scared about this, jumped up and down and stopped the New World from using these terms

The New World producers, having no way to market or describe their wines to their

consumers, turned to the only thing they could still use, the Variety. Luckily most of the grapes in the New World came from France and the varieties were easy to pronounce and so we got labels with Chardonnay, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Riesling, Pinot Noir etc. Thus our fascination with varietal wines began.

However, many believe we have missed out on the “sum being greater than the individual parts” concept, with the majority of consumers associating blends with cheap or inferior wines. We have also missed out on the development and recognition of our own regions and regional styles. The link between places and varieties like Barossa Shiraz and Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon are starting to become well known and gain some traction, but will it ever get to the stage that the label will just read Barossa Valley or Coonawarra- Maybe not! Remember names like Bordeaux and Burgundy are just regions in France. *(Continued on page 4)*



*Kim Bickley, Head Sommelier
Glass Brasserie / Sydney Hilton*

THE WINES

2011 VINTELOPER ADELO *South Australia*



WHY KIM CHOSE THIS WINE

"I chose this wine for a couple of reasons, but mostly because I think it's a great example of why we shouldn't be afraid of blended wines. Aussie's tend to stick to straight varietals and by doing so can miss out on some exciting wines like David's Adelo. It has great juicy texture and delicious red and blue berry notes that come from the Shiraz & Pinot; and a spicy savoury edge that comes from the Touriga, it's a perfect combination."

David Bowley the "maverick" owner and winemaker of Vintelofer explains that Adelo is derived from the Latin root meaning 'obscure'. This makes a lot of sense, for not only does this wine fit Kim's theme of alternative varieties, it is also fits her blended theme as well, being a combination of:

65%	Touriga Nacional from Langhorne Creek,
25%	Shiraz from McLaren Vale
10%	Pinot Noir from the Adelaide Hills.

This is a wine that will excite almost every wine geek, for it is an obscure and unique blend from a trendy new winery. However a lot of these obscure and interesting wines can be duds. When Kim and I tasted the wine together I was overjoyed that the quality of the wine matched my expectations. It is a light to medium bodied wine that is utterly delicious. We have also secured the last of the 2011 vintage for our members. This wine has now sold out and David has kept the last cases for the members of Bullion. Thanks!

So what does the wine taste like: My summary is a complex beautifully scented wine, with violets and spice mingling with plum and berry notes.

DAVID DESCRIBES THE WINE THIS WAY With alternative varieties and wine styles emerging in Australia, my love for the obscure found an avenue for expression in this wine. Each variety is sourced from a single vineyard in the greater Adelaide Geographical Indication;

Touriga Nacional, Shiraz and Pinot Noir. Touriga Nacional lays the foundations, bringing depth of flavour and savoury richness to the young wine. The Shiraz chimes in with white pepper and violet aromatics and flavours, which run right through the palate. Finally, the noble Pinot Noir adds elegance and a good dash of acidity to ensure a clean finish.

The predominant Touriga Nacional is a Portuguese grape variety that is traditionally used in the fortified wines of Port; however a lot of the wineries in Portugal are diverting vineyard resources away from Port into making sensational table wines. David is merely following this trend, just in his own unique way.

WHO IS VINTELOPER?

David established Vintelofer in 2008 and in that time he has certainly created a buzz. He has focused his distribution and sales through restaurants and fine wine retailers and his tiny volumes are now on allocation. For example only 243 cases of the 2011 Adelo were made. David is often described as Urbane and a bit of a maverick, for he has set up his winery in the centre of Adelaide city. David owns no vineyards, but instead works closely with growers made up of family and friends. He works closely with these friends managing the whole process from pruning and harvest, then transporting the grapes back to his "garage" style winery in the city. He is in a partnership with these vineyards, in some cases having physically worked on them for years.

The wine media love this guy's story and I can see why. He has got his fair share of publicity, but more importantly David has been able to back this up with some high quality winemaking and excellent wines. This is a winemaker to watch, for if this is what he can do in 5 years, developing a cult like atmosphere around himself and his wines, what will he do in the next 10.

FOOD MATCHINGS I would stick to foods that match well with lighter style wines like Pinot Noir, although it is nothing like Pinot- It has a broader flavour profile. Crispy skin duck, or a roast pork dish with crackling would be sensational, or try with one of those trendy pizzas with all the different and strange toppings

CELLARING POTENTIAL This wine is very approachable now and will cellar for the next 3-5 years, but why wait, enjoy it now as the weather starts to get a little warmer.

2009 DOMAINE LES HAUTES CANCES - CAIRANNE - COTES DU RHONE "CUVEE TRADITION" *France Grenache, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignane and Counoise*



WHY KIM CHOSE THIS WINE

"Again, a blended wine with complexity and yet it's just plain delicious to drink. The Rhone Valley in France is the home of Grenache Shiraz blends and has 21 different varietals that are an option to blend. I love the Rhone wines for their ability to match so many foods."

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 interesting. These are Grenache based wines that reach their apex with the famed and expensive wines of Châteauneuf-du- Pape. Kim and I attended the same importer tasting and both ended up at the Rhone table, where this wine from a lesser known village blew us away, tasting much better than its more fancied and more expensive Châteauneuf-du- Pape's.

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. What makes Hautes Cances different is that the owners Jean-Marie Astart and his wife, Anne-Marie, were completely immersed in other professions, he, a psychiatrist and she, trained in the medical field, both without any winemaking experience whatsoever.

When the vineyard came to them through inheritance, and after a great deal of soul-searching, they chose to devote all of their time to re-building the family domaine, first by taking a crash course in winemaking, then by building an incredible new winemaking facility in 2004,

right into the hillside for natural temperature control.

Another reason for the great quality of wines at Domaine les Hautes Cances 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 that they now manage using organic principals.

This wine is not heavy or over-ripe. It is just the perfect glass of Rhone wine. I would have to say its sophistication is what sets it apart. It has it all — the rich, blackberry fruit with a roundness in the mouth and a fragrance which transports you right to the vineyard in the Rhone.

But it is not just us, Robert Parker one of the most famous Wine Writers in the world also agrees *"Readers looking for powerful, concentrated, muscular reds that sell for a song should check out Domaine les Hautes Cances offerings. These unfiltered, unrefined Cairannes possess abundant quantities of earthy, muscular fruit, rustic tannin, and nearly savage personalities."*
Robert Parker - The Wine Advocate

All the fruit is hand harvested, hand selected and completely destemmed. The wines undergo extended periods of maceration under temperature controlled conditions in traditional stainless steel tanks so as to preserve the natural fruit characters. After blending, maturation in older oak continues over one year. The wines are then bottled without filtering. The percentage of the grape varieties will vary from vintage to vintage, but will always be predominately Grenache.

CELLARING POTENTIAL The 2009 vintage was a cracker in the Rhone and this wine has another 5-8 years. Decant before serving for at least 20 minutes.

by Kim Bickley *Head Sommelier / Glass Brasserie / Sydney Hilton*

2009 DOMAINE A. & P. DE VILLAINÉ, BOUZERON, ALIGOTÉ



Burgundy, France

WHY KIM CHOSE THIS WINE

"This is such an exciting wine, its couple of years in the bottle provide a complexity and nuttiness that I find very attractive. Because it has a mineral backbone and notes of sweet herbs, its an ideal wine to try for those who have liked the dryer Sauvignon Blancs and are now ready to try something new."

There are three initials that send a shiver down all wine lovers — DRC -Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. These are the most expensive and most sought after wines on the planet. They produce single vineyard wines from the most famous vineyards in Burgundy and the world—Romanée-Conti, Richebourg, and La Tâche to name a few. Current release wines sell for \$2000 a bottle, with famed earlier vintages reaching four and five times these figures. Very scary stuff, but if you can afford it, something to add to the Bucket List! What is not so well

known is that Albert De Villaine, the wine director and co owner of DRC, has slowly developed his own wine label since the 1970's. (Well Kim knew, which is why we can offer it to our members).

When he inherited DRC in the 1970's he did not want to live in the high profile areas of the famed Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, so they moved into a dilapidated estate in the lesser known village of Bouzeron, further south in the Côte Chalonnaise. Whilst his day to day focus was on the wines of DRC, he slowly built up a fantastic reputation for this village and the largely unknown and unloved white grape variety Aligoté. The domaine was horribly rundown when the de Villaines Took over, but after years of development you can now enjoy these wines for a fraction of the price of his much more famous DRC wines.

So what do you get when you mix DRC love and care with the Aligoté Grape variety — One amazing wine. We had to negotiate pretty hard to get this wine into our delivery, for it still sits way outside

our pricing guidelines. But the sales rep used to work for Kim and we both twisted his arm.

So why did De Villaine focus on Aligoté and not the more famous Chardonnay of the area. Who knows — maybe he did it just because he was there and so was the vineyard. He began the conversion to organic farming of the estate in 1986, becoming biodynamic in 1997, the year the region gained it's own AOC appellation, largely due to Albert's advocacy of this village and this variety. In 2000 Albert handed the day to day winemaking duties to his nephew, but their shared passion is about rediscovering the identity of Bouzeron and in particular the Aligoté grape in its original golden form.

So what is Aligoté and Bouzeron. It is a white wine that is typically dry in style, very aromatic and light-bodied, with great acidity and a silky mouthfeel. Bouzeron is located only 5 kmls from the prestigious Cote de Beaune slopes of Chassagne-Montrachet, sharing similar soils and climate but thankfully selling for a fraction of the price. Aligoté was at one time a work horse of the Burgundy area, but over the past 60 years, plantings have largely been replaced by the more fancied Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Bouzeron is like an isolated island in a sea of Chardonnay and Pinot.

I loved this wine when I tasted it, and then finished the bottle later that evening. It's crisp and lean with a distinct floral note and a stony almost almond finish. It's got a ton of finesse and understated elegance. Due to its great acidity, it is excellent as an apéritif, but would pair well with seafood or a plate of cheeses.

You might notice some crystal like particles in the wine, but do not be concerned, these are just Tartaric Crystals which are completely tasteless and harmless. Producers like De Villaine do not like to interfere too much in the wine making process, and whilst most winemakers will cold stabilise the wine to take these crystals out of the wine, De Villaine does not think it is necessary.

CELLARING POTENTIAL The experts tell us these wines can really age, so the wine can handle another 5 years, but I reckon why wait, it is sensational right now.

2008 SANTA RITA MEDALLA REAL CARMÉNÈRE

Colchagua Valle, Chile



WHY KIM CHOSE THIS WINE

"Chile with it's ideal environment produces some very exciting wines. Carménère is such an intriguing varietal and I really enjoy the texture in the wines it produces. Its combination with a sweet herbaceousness and layers of flavour are very seductive."

Carménère is a grape variety with a split personality. Carménère used to be widely planted in Bordeaux, but when phylloxera (The Grapevine pest) wiped out the vineyards of Bordeaux at the end of the 19th century, the winemakers decided they would not replant this variety and focus instead on the other five (Cab Sauv / Merlot/ Petit Verdot / Cabernet Franc / Malbec) This was the end of Carménère, or so we thought.

During the middle of the 19th Century, the New World wine industry was just getting started with cuttings taken from the European vineyards — or to be more accurate the vineyards of France. Fast forward 100 years and Chile was beginning to get a reputation for

their Merlot wines. Then a French expert visited the area in the late 1980's and told them their Merlot was in fact Carménère. It was a blessing in disguise, for this has since gone onto be the signature grape for Chile, a bit like Malbec is associated with Argentina and Shiraz with Australia.

The Santa Rita winery is big- very big. Founded in 1880, they now have 5 wineries across the major winemaking areas of Chile, with a combined storage capacity of over 91 million litres. That is more than 10 million cases of wine. They are one of the largest wine groups in South

America, also owing wineries in Argentina (Donna Paula). The thing you have to realize about big wineries is that despite the fact they make an incredible amount of commercial wine, they also make prestigious wines as well. Remember the same people that give you Grange, also makes Lindemans Bin 65. Santa Rita is no exception to this rule, with the Medalla Real range of wines being some of their best.

The fruit for the Medalla Real range are sourced from two vineyards in the Colchagua Valley D.O. in the lower coastal areas of the Andes allowing for cooling sea breeze influences which permit longer, even growing seasons. (This leads to more elegant wines of great fruit intensity and natural acidity) The two specific vineyard areas are the Marchigüe which has shallow granitic/ clay soils, and the famed Apalta vineyard known for its deep granitic solis; arguably Chile's finest.

Carménère requires a long ripening period, so the wines are a little higher in alcohol than most (14-14.5%) however the good ones are in complete balance with the fruit and the acid.

This wine is just gorgeous, with a seductive bordelaise nose of black currant, plum, and aged tobacco. This wine really does give an excellent impression of a high quality Bordeaux wine, but without the dusty tannins. It has a deep intense ruby colour and a complex bouquet that combines fresh black fruits and spicy notes with elegantly defined oak, heightening the wine's chocolate and vanilla characteristics. It is soft and round in the mouth, but with a powerful body and a very long finish. Delicious with steak, barbecue, venison, game birds, and ripe blue cheeses.

CELLARING POTENTIAL Now for the next 3-7 years- Decant this wine for 20 minutes before drinking.



YOUR WINE EXPERT

Kim Bickley

Head Sommelier, Glass Brassiere Hilton – Sydney / Gold Coast

Kim Bickley is Hilton's Group Sommelier for the Sydney & Surfers Paradise Hotels and an active committee member of Sommeliers Australia NSW chapter.

A CMS Certified Sommelier, who finished in the top eleven students in Australia to be certified by the Court of Master Sommeliers in Australia in 2008, Kim is also an enthusiastic wine show judge, a Len Evans and Sommeliers Australia Tutorial Scholar and was one of the first, of only two Australian scholars, of the International 'Landmark Australia' Tutorial 2010.

Glass Brassiere has one of Australia's most prestigious wine lists and showcases an extensive selection of Australian and imported wine. Having received numerous awards, the Glass Brasserie most recently went into the 'Hall of Fame' for a 3 time win of the "Best International Hotel Wine List" at the Australian Wine List of the Year Awards 2011 (2010, 2009 & 2008). The 'Best Wine List' in 2009 and 'Best Regional Wine List' in 2008 and 2007 at the Restaurant & Caterers Association New South Wales have also been awarded. The Glass Brasserie also holds a "Best Award of Excellence" from Wine Spectator Magazine.

A Look at Alternative Varieties and Blends *(Continued from page 1)*

I will also let you into a little secret, a lot of wines in the New World are blends anyway, for the labeling laws allow up to 15% of another variety to be added to the wine, without being listed on the label. Therefore your favourite Clare Valley Shiraz could have up to 15% Cabernet Sauvignon in it. (Even Grange does this. Depending on the vintage it can and does have up to 5-8% Cabernet Sauvignon.)

I want to quote Nick Stock, who wrote the following in the Gourmet Traveller in June 2011, as it sums it up better than I ever could.

"It's high time we extinguished the Australian varietal fire we stoked throughout the 1980s, poured fuel on in the 90s, and watched burn out of control through most of the noughties. New varieties are interesting. Great reds are convincing and it's time we moved on and focused fairly and squarely on wines of authenticity, pedigree and place."

Today's Next Big Things in red wine are the drops that strike a unique chord, tap into the dirt, the hill, the proximity to the sea or the mountains, the mist, the fog and the accumulated knowledge of up to six generations in some places. They are wines that deliver something truly unique."

So don't get hung up on the variety you are drinking. Focus on the wine, the producer and the regional style. This is what is important. All the wines that Kim has chosen, tap into this theme of authenticity. They are wines from single varieties, but also blends of up to 5 different grapes. They come from incredibly huge multi-national producers, with over 100 years of tradition, but also small producers who have been making their own wine for less than 5 years. What they all have in common is this authenticity and their commitment and focus on their vineyards and the quality of the wine that is under their label.

I am very excited about these wines, as I have already shared them with a few of my wine industry mates and they were as blown away as I was, but then again I know that the next selection is just around the corner and I will have something else to drink and learn about – What a great job!

Matthew Eagan

DID YOU KNOW?

Australia has a similar split personality grape story. There was a buzz around the Albarino wines coming out of Australia for the past 8 years. Albarino is a white Spanish grape variety that is very drought resistant, with Australian winemakers thinking they were onto a winner. All was going well, until a French wine expert visited a vineyard (What is it with these guys?) and declared that the variety everyone thought was Albarino, was in fact a native and obscure French grape variety called Savagnin. And so began the story of Australian Savagnin. A pretty good wine style actually, try the Tscharke "Girls Talk" Savagnin if you want a good example – A dry white wine with great acidity and that nuttiness that I really like.



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan – The Bullion Cellars Team