

THE

GOLDEN THREAD

IN THIS ISSUE: YOUR WINES, YOUR WINE EXPERT, CORKS AND TCA

Pockets of Brilliance ...

For this selection, Stuart Knox of Fix St James in Sydney, has decided to look at some of the lesser know regions of France and Australia. Wines that show great value, particularly when put alongside their more famous neighbours. The problem with well know regions is that you pay for their reputation. When the top wines of a region sell above \$1000 per bottle (Largely due to the Iconic nature of a handful of producers) the rest of the wines are dragged up as well.

A prime case in point is Bordeaux. These are fantastic wines, but to purchase even a half decent wine in Australia will cost upwards of \$100, and in my opinion, not really worth a third of this price. That is why it is so good we can rely on the sommeliers at Bullion Cellars to come up with some real gems.

Stuart's selection includes three wines from France and an Australian Cabernet from Tasmania, of all places!

Two of the red wines are from the South West of France - Bergerac and Minervios. Bergerac is a wine region that has lived in the shadow of Bordeaux for centuries. However, it is a region that offers high quality wines for a fraction of their price. It should come as no great surprise, as they share a similar "terrior" (climate / geography etc) and grow the same varieties. Those of you who love Bordeaux and Cabernet based wines will love this Bergerac blend.

The other wine is from Minervois in the South of France, part of a larger region called the Languedoc Roussillon. This greater region is the engine room of the French wine industry and like any large scale wine region there are pockets of brilliance. Minervois is one such pocket. The wine Stuart chose is a blend Syrah with the native grape variety (Carignan). A great combination of rustic charm and elegance.

Next up from France, is a Riesling from my favourite region – Alsace. I have been lucky enough to visit Alsace and it has it all, medi-evil towns with cobble stone streets, surrounded by vineyards coming right up to the houses. Alsace is all about white wines, and Riesling is king.

The Australian wine was a revelation to me. I had heard of the winery, but not really connected with it. Maybe it was the Tasmania thing. You associate Tasmania with the "Greens" and Pinot Noir. Well, I will need to change my assessment. This is a Cabernet Blend from a producer called Domaine A and it is sensational.

So there you go, four wines from four regions you might not have looked at before, but after drinking them you will want to try some more.

Enjoy, Matthew



Stuart Knox,
Owner/Sommelier Fix St. James



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan – The Bullion Cellars Team

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SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES

2009 DOMAINE DE L' ANCIENNE CURE – BERGERAC ROUGE – L' ABBAYE *France*



The region of Bordeaux is generally divided into two sections. The Left and Right Bank. They refer to vineyards that lie on either side of the Gironde River. In a very simplistic overview, the Left bank has wines with a larger percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon and the Right bank has a larger percentage of Merlot.

The region of Bergerac is just a little further right and South of the "Right Bank". In fact it is around 45 kms East of the city of Bordeaux, sharing similar soils and climates. Being right of the "Right Bank" this wine is mainly Merlot (55%) with the balance being Malbec.

Domaine de l'Ancienne Cure can trace their history back five generations, first making wine in the late 1800's. It was in 1935 that they started to get serious, purchasing the ruins of an old vicarage and turning it into their winery centre. (The name Ancienne Cure means former Vicarage) Like with most quality producers they have gone "Organic" in their vineyard practices. What I love about this

wine, is that at only 12.5% alcohol, it still carries plenty of weight and structure. You can enjoy a few glasses and confidently move onto a second bottle without getting too rowdy.

The fruit was all handpicked, and went through a temperature controlled fermentation over 6 days. The wine was then transferred to oak barrels (20% new and 80% one year old) resting on lees for 15 months before bottling. The 2009 vintage is considered a classic in Bordeaux and Bergerac is no exception.

The colour is deep red and the nose is lifted with a complex combination of black cherries, subtle spices and toasty elements. This wine has great structure, balance and length and whilst drinking well now, it will reward careful cellaring.

WHY STUART CHOSE THIS WINE

We all know the wines of Bordeaux, majestic chateaus with great history and commanding even greater prices. But travel a little further south and you hit the appellation of Bergerac. The wines of Bergerac are made from the same varieties as Bordeaux (in this case Merlot 55% / Malbec 45%) but at a fraction of the price. This wine shows very intense fruit and structure. But don't think of that horrible "merlot" that people often talk of.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking. This wine can be cellared for the next 5 years.

2010 ABBOTTS & DELAUNAY – CUMULO NIMBUS MINERVOIS – SYRAH – CARIGNAN *France*



This is a wine with an Australian Connection. Nerida Abbott (An Australian Wine maker) established the winery in 1996, near the town of Montpellier in the Languedoc region. It was then purchased in 2006 by Laurent Delaunay, a Burgundy based negotiant, who was convinced by the tremendous potential of the Languedoc's terroirs. Having purchased the winery, he set about a slow transformation in the style.

"Since our first vintage in 2007 we have developed the winemaking to our own taste. The consumer now wants elegance, fruit and less oak. It's been a three to four year process of evolution."

The 2010 Cumulo Nimbus offers this style in spades. The wine is lavish, but certainly not over the top. It is part of their flagship range of wines, called Storms and Clouds – hence the name

Historically the wines of Minervois were made from the native grape variety Carignan, however a lot of the recent improvement in quality

can be traced back to the inclusion of Syrah and Mouvedre in the blends. The Cumulo Nimbus consists of 90% Shiraz – 10% Carignan and is all the better for it. The fruit is handpicked from old vine, high altitude vineyards and made in tiny quantities. The wine only spent 6 months in 1-2 year old French barrels, but the oak supports the powerful fruit.

An elegant wine with blackcurrant, plum and violet characters, but with a distinct mineral edge that keeps the wine intriguing. This is a great example of the modern style of Minervois. You have

the slightly rustic and hearty elements from the Carignan, but this is enhanced and complimented by the elegance and silkiness of the Shiraz. The result is an hypnotic wine that is seamless with a silky and luscious finish.

WHY STUART CHOSE THIS WINE

"A cracking wine from the Languedoc. This is a large region but it really resonates with the Australian palate. Great fruit and spice in this wine that everyone will enjoy and an absolute bargain in comparison to the Syrah's from the neighbouring Rhone Valley."

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This is a keeper. Decant the wine for 30 minutes before drinking, but you can safely cellar this wine for the next 8-10 years. However why wait, this is a magic wine that should be enjoyed with your friends whilst you are still young enough to enjoy it.



2006 STONEY VINEYARD CABERNET SAUVIGNON - DOMAINE A

Coal River Tasmania



As I indicated this wine was a revelation to me. Tasmania is all about Pinot Noir and Sparkling wine right! The quality of this wine should come as no great surprise, as the winery has a big reputation with a wine in the prestigious Langton's classification, but it was the second label Cabernet that caught Stuart's and mine attention.

Calling this "Stoney Vineyard" a second label is an injustice. It's from vines planted in 1973, made from 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, 4% Merlot and 2% Petit Verdot. The fruit is hand picked and sorted at the winery, then matured in French Oak for 33 months, before cellaring in the bottle for another 2 years before release. This sort of stuff just does not happen at this price

Domaine A is a 20ha property in the Coal River Valley of Southern Tasmania, owned and operated by Swiss born Peter and Ruth Althaus.

The secret of the vineyard, and why they can ripen fruit in such a southerly location, is the closely spaced vines (restricting the yield)

and the sloping northerly aspect, enabling the vines to full ripen, taking advantage of the prolonged summer sunshine.

The wines are made without compromise in the spirit of the finest traditions of European winemaking. This wine is a homage to the owner's love of Bordeaux and it really is more European than your typical Aussie Cab.

The wine needs to breathe and open up, and once it does you will find lovely aromas of ripe berries and cigar box characters. There is a great interplay between the fruit and tannins on the palate, showing lovely blackcurrant, dried herbs and glossy chocolate. A very serious wine indeed.

WHY STUART CHOOSE THIS WINE

"Tasmanian Cabernet? Really! Well yes. This particular vineyard site is a heat and light trapping amphitheatre which gives owner Peter Althaus the chance to get his Cabernet vines to full ripeness. The other factor in this wine that really does it for me is that it is released when it is ready, not when the bean counters say it has to be."

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This wine needs to be decanted for at least 20 minutes, allowing the wine to open up. Whilst being almost 6 years old, this wine has another 5-6 years in the cellar easy. But why wait, this wine is in the zone right now.

DID YOU KNOW?

A Tasmanian Wine won the Jimmy Watson Trophy for the first time last year, and instead of a Pinot Noir it was for a Shiraz – The 2010 Mon Pere Shiraz. The winemaker does come from Barossa royalty- the Glatzezer family, so he has plenty of experience in this variety.

2011 MADER RIESLING

Alsace, France



Mader is a small family producer from the village of Hunawir in the middle of the famed "Route du Vins" of Alsace. Alsace is on the border of Germany and France, and at different times during its long history it has been considered part of both countries.

It is one of the prettiest wine regions you will ever see, with a series of small medieval villages that are scattered throughout the region with their cobble stone streets, thatched houses and vineyards leading right up to their doors.

Alsace is all about white wines with its Riesling generating most of the buzz. The wines are normally dry, but like the German Rieslings to the East, they can have a little bit of sweetness, but this is balanced by the bracing acidity of the wines.

I love the freshness and versatility of the wines from Alsace. It's the acidity that allows it to handle difficult food matchings. The acid allows the wine to handle hearty sauces, yet still match the tangy flavors of ginger and lime in Asian foods. Then there are the clean

and crisp flavours in the wine, ranging from pear, apple, citrus and lime.

This Mader Riesling offers all of these and more. It boasts attractive lemon and lime zest on the nose and a palate that offers a rich texture in the mouth. If you can wait, this would be a great wine to match with Christmas Turkey. However Alsace Rieslings are just made for Thai, Vietnamese and Chinese dishes.

Mader have recently gone bio-dynamic in their winemaking. The practice of Bio-dynamics is particularly popular in Alsace, with most of the quality producers following these principles. (Take a look at our Newsletter from Matt Dunne's selection in June 2012 for more information on Bio-dynamics).

WHY STUART CHOOSE THIS WINE

"Ok, so the Alsace is a bit more well known than the other regions we've looked at, but on a world scale the Rieslings from here are still great wines that are undervalued. This isn't a tight dry wine, it has more weight and texture than most Australian Rieslings, so drink it with fuller foods than you might initially think."

CELLARING POTENTIAL

We think this wine would be best enjoyed over the short term. Now and for the next 12 months.

DID YOU KNOW?

Alsace is the only region in France that allows its quality wines to place the varietal on the label. Something to do with German heritage. Plus they have more Michelin Star restaurants in Alsace than any other region in France.

YOUR WINE EXPERT



Stuart Knox *Owner/Sommelier, Fix St James – Sydney*

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.

In 1997 Stuart decided to move to smaller restaurants and began work at Edna's Table with Jennice & Raymond Kersh.

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. Working with a 1500 bottle strong wine list & guided by leading UK wine writer & buyer Matthew Jukes saw Stuart stay on in London till late 2001 when he returned to the fairer weather of Sydney.

On his return 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. He sold Fix @ Castlereagh in January 2008 to concentrate all of his efforts on Fix St James.

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.

TCA / Corks

I have talked about corks in an earlier newsletter, but we have had a lot of new members join up since then, and as the sommeliers are selecting more imported wines with Cork closures, I thought I would just go over some of the issues again.

Firstly – Corks are not a great closure. The only reason they are still used in Europe is due to history and a reluctance of the big name wines to mess around with their brand image, believing their customers associate cork closures with higher quality wines. If they were being honest and had to start from scratch, Corks would not be used.

Luckily in Australia, the industry moved on mass in the early 2000's. But in Europe and the US they are still stuck on Cork.

So what is the problem with cork? Three little initials – TCA – Or more scientific - 2,4,6-Trichloroanisole

This is the cause of the scary "Corked Wine" that we often hear about. Basically TCA is a fairly common fungus that unfortunately is also found around the "Cork Trees" in Portugal, attaching to the bark of the Cork trees, and hence onto the corks themselves. There are no health issues associated with drinking wines affected by TCA, rather it is much more insidious. It has the effect of giving the wine a musty or "wet cardboard" character – Ruining any wine.

Unfortunately there are no tests that can be run prior to the corks being used to detect this TCA, but thankfully the cork suppliers have done a lot of work to clean up their act and things are a lot better than they were 10 years ago.

Corks are also prone to oxidization and are not good at handling heat, which causes the wine to expand and push the corks out, again causing oxidization.

So what do you do if you think a bottle from Bullion Cellars is Corked- Firstly take a photo of the open bottle and send the photo back to us in e-mail. We have an arrangement with the importers, who will refund us if any bottles are corked, and so likewise we will refund you.

We are trying to stick to Screw Cap as often as we can, but in our journey through the wines of the world and Australia, corks are something we will have to deal with.

But don't be overly concerned, this is only a minor issue, but an annoying one, none the less

Also on corks, there really is no need to sniff the corks when opening a bottle or when the sommelier presents the wine to you at a restaurant.

The whole presentation of the cork goes back a few hundred years or so, when in Europe there were a lot of counterfeit wines. A label on the wine can be easily changed, but changing the cork is much harder. So the producers started branding the corks. The cork was therefore presented to the diner to verify that this was infact the wine they ordered.

When the whole smelling thing happened, I am not sure. Smelling the cork will tell you nothing about the wine in the bottle. If the cork is crumbling or excessively wet, it will give you're a hint, but it will still only smell of cork and wine.

When the wine is presented to you at your table, you are checking to see if the wine is free of this TCA, and only smelling the wine will tell you that. If you are in any doubt ask the sommelier for their opinion. Remember the importer/producer has an arrangement to replace any "Corked" wines so the Sommelier will call it as they see it.