

the bullionaire

BULLION 168

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A new blend of style and taste...

Adrian Filuta from the Merivale Group is back on the deck this quarter. For those not familiar with the Merivale name; this is a restaurant and bar group owned by Justin Hemmes, who has added a level of style, elegance and sophistication in Sydney that everyone else is trying to emulate. Adrian is one of Merivale's senior Sommeliers and has recently taken his spitoon to the "The Paddington"; a great new venue in the heart of Oxford St.

The wines Adrian has chosen are quite full bodied, perfect heading into the cooler months, but they are also elegant and sophisticated. Wines to drink over lazy, long lunches and decadent, indulgent dinner parties.

Excited? ... So are we.

We've been saying for a while that Chardonnay is the new black. It has been a long time since we have sent a Chardonnay in our Sommelier Selections, but it has been worth the wait.

But first, a bit of history. Chardonnay was first released in Australia by Tyrrell's Wines back in 1971; so it has a fairly recent history. This new style of wine quickly gained popularity, such that, in the late 1980's it was as ubiquitous as Sauvignon Blanc is today. Oceans of big, buttery Chardonnay were consumed both here and in the UK, as it spear headed the Export boom of the early 1990's. All trends and fads eventually fade and so it was with Aussie Chardonnay. People tired of this big opulent style, which was so closely associated with the excess of the 80's. Think Allan Bond, Christopher Skase, Shoulder Pads and big hair.

Then along came the fresh, fruity and vibrant Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and you could not give Chardonnay away. As a result, thousands of hectares of Chardonnay were ripped up or replanted to red grapes. But fast forward 20 years and Chardonnay is gaining popularity again. Gone are the buttery, oaky styles, with all the MLF the winemakers could throw at the wine. (MLF stands for Malolactic Fermentation, which is a winemaking process where tart-tasting malic acid, naturally present in grape must, is converted to softer-tasting lactic acid, creating the full bodied buttery style)

We now have Chardonnay's sourced from cooler climates (think Yarra Valley / Tasmania / Adelaide Hills), producing leaner styles with very little if any MLF. Australian winemakers now talk about a "Chablis style", referring to the Northern Burgundy region of Chablis, which produces a leaner crisper style of chardonnay with prominent minerality and acidity, with far less reliance on oak.

However in our opinion, many of these "New" Australian Chardonnays have forgotten that good Chablis has plenty of flavour to match the minerality and acidity. Thankfully we are moving towards a happy medium of minerality



and flavour and the **2013 Journey Yarra Valley Chardonnay** is a prime example of this "New New" style.

Journey wines is the love child of Damien North, a Sommelier turned winemaker and a darling of the wine media and Sommeliers alike.

Damian's journey into wine began as a sommelier working at landmark Sydney restaurants like Tetsuya's and Pier in Rose Bay. He then decided to enrol in a winemaking course, leading to a role at Tarrawarra in the Yarra Valley, before moving to Oregon to pursue his love affair of Pinot Noir. Here he discovered that man cannot live on Pinot alone and eventually headed to the Margaret River and Leeuwin Estate to learn about Chardonnay. Quite a resume, but his real challenge began when he moved back to the Yarra Valley with his young family, starting his own brand and virtual winery. His 2013 Yarra Chardonnay is just sensational. It completely marries the new and old style of Chardonnay.

Next up is a return of an old favourite; the **2011 Condado de Haza** from the Ribera del Duero in Northern /Central Spain. I have a love affair with Spain, with most of my spare cash spent on the great wines from Ribera del Duero and Priorat. I was overjoyed when Adrian suggested this wine, for it has given me an excuse to stock up my cellar. We sent out the 2009 vintage of this wine in the December 2013 selection.

Spain is red hot right now in Australia. Every restaurant and funky wine bar is crammed with the wines from Rioja, Ribera del Duero and Priorat, as punters look for something different to Shiraz and Cabernet. These are not the "wine on steroids" that some areas are promoting to the world, but wine making that has kept the tradition and a "sense of place", showing what you can do with great old vineyards and careful use of modern winemaking practices.

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SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED



THE WINES

2013 IACOB RED *Dealu Mare, Romania*

Cabernet Sauvignon / Fetească Neagră



Davino is the top producer in Romania and this is one of their flagship wines. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon with Fetească Neagră, also known as 'Black Maiden', which is one of Romania's oldest grape varieties, known for its dark colour and strong tannins. It is made in a definite new world style and I can see why it is regarded as one of the country's top wines.

The Region of Dealu Mare sits on the same parallel which goes through Piedmont and Bordeaux, however the climate is more continental – Warm summers and very cold winters. All this adds up to a great place to grow grapes and with new investment and modern winemaking practices coming into the country, the sky is the limit. In fact, it is widely accepted that the two areas which will generate the most excitement over the next 10 years will be Eastern Europe and South America. For pretty much the same region. Well established vineyards with both international and indigenous grape varieties, an influx of foreign investment and modern winemaking / viticultural practices, favourable exchange rates and cheap labour costs.

The fruit was picked at quite ripe levels, with the two grape varieties vinified separately. The juice was kept on skins for different times, 15 days for the Fetească Neagră, 21 days for the Cabernet Sauvignon; reflecting the very dark and tannic nature of the Fetească Neagră. The wine was aged in Romanian oak barrels for 9 months and then was released after 12 months in the bottle.

You cannot help but think of a "New World" Bordeaux, when you drink this wine. Taking the best characteristics of each. The complexity and structure you associate with Bordeaux, with the freshness and fleshiness of the new world. A winning combination.

The nose is intense and full of blackcurrant aromas with notes of coffee and pepper. Dark cherries, plums and chocolate in the mouth with undertones of spice and vanilla from 9 months ageing in Romanian oak barrels. Supple tannins and a good structure lead to a long and persistent finish.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Like with Cabernet or Bordeaux, rich protein dishes like Steak and beef would be ideal. The tannins and rich flavours will cut through the strong flavours of these red meats. You could also match with Tomato based pasta dishes, roast lamb or even slow corked Pork belly.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking. This can be cellared for another 3-5 years.

2013 JOURNEY YARRA VALLEY CHARDONNAY *Yarra Valley, Australia*



Journey is the love child of Damien North, Sommelier turned winemaker and he really has taken a journey around the world to reach the Yarra Valley and the three wines he produces under his label; Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Shiraz. All have been sourced from high quality growers and well established vineyards and his wines are only sold through fine dining restaurants. As you can imagine with this background, the sommeliers in our major cities just love his story and love his wines, which thankfully are even better than the story behind the label.

The wine is sourced from three vineyards in the Yarra Valley, all planted to different clones. The whole-bunch fruit was pressed while cool. The juice settled for around 18 hours before racking to barrel with high solids content. Fermentation with wild yeast took place in 25% new French 500 litre puncheons, with the remainder in one and two year old French puncheons and older French barriques.

Once fermentation was complete the wine was sulphured immediately with no malolactic fermentation. The wine remained on yeast lees in barrel for 10 months, stirred to enhance complexity and mouth-feel only in the early stages of maturation. It was bottled in Early 2014 and really benefits from the 2 years it has been in the bottle.

This is just a beautiful wine. Engaging complexity on the nose, with melons and honeysuckle aromas, but it is on the palate where this wine really sings. Cracking acidity and minerality add texture and weight to the wine, with the flavours and palate seeming to last forever. This is my favourite drinking Chardonnay over the past 2 years..

FOOD MATCHINGS

Perfect with light and delicate seafood's such as shellfish, crab, prawns and oysters. Also great with sushi and sashimi. It can also handle slightly richer dishes like salmon and chicken, pork or pasta in a creamy sauce. A very versatile wine.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This wine is in the zone right now, with over 3 years under its belt. You could safely cellar for another 5 years, but why wait. Enjoy now!



2013 CHÂTEAU DE LASCAUX *Languedoc, France*

60% Syrah 35% Grenache 5% Mourvèdre

Jean-Benoît Cavalier (the 13th Generation) took control of the property in 1984, after finishing a degree in Agricultural Engineering. In 1990, he consolidated the vineyards, restructured the ancient cellars, and created the official domaine, Château de Lascaux. Today the estate has expanded to 85 hectares of vineyards, surrounded by three-hundred hectares of forest, filled with green oaks, pines, and garrigue, so important in the overall terroir. This small pocket of land is a jewel in the sea that is the generic Languedoc. The proximity to both the sea and the mountains, makes this tiny microclimate unique to the region. This temperate zone brings a long, slow ripening of the grapes, adding to the wines' complexity. The stony soil lends finesse and freshness to his wines, giving the reds greater aging potential than Syrah-based wines grown in other Languedoc soils. The proliferation of garrigue certainly is reflected in the aromatics, where notes of thyme, rosemary and mint are present in the wines.

Jean-Benoît is passionate about supporting the richness and diversity of this ecosystem, so the domaine's conversion to organic viticulture was a logical choice.

This wine exudes both the ripe and savory qualities of the region. The Syrah brings a spicy component to the wine, offering notes of black pepper, coriander, and bramble. Then you get these lovely floral aromatics and flavours coming through onto a mid-weight palate; juicy black cherries with hints of dried black tea leaves, and black pepper. I love the complexity and tension in the wine. It is not a huge wine, but it has elegance and a mouthfeel I just love.

FOOD MATCHINGS

It can pair with a wide range of foods, but is definitely well suited to hearty braised dishes, stews or tomato-based dishes. Try it with slow cooked lamb, Mediterranean type stews with olives and rosemary, or with a mushroom risotto.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking. You can cellar for another 5-7 years.



2011 CONDADO DE HAZA TEMPRANILLO *Ribera del Duero, Spain*

Alejandro Fernández is the poster child for the rise and rise of the 'New Spain'. He is one of the greats of modern Spanish viticulture and a pioneer of Ribera del Duero and the Tempranillo grape. Pesquera was the first estate he established and the one that launched his fame. The critical acclaim was instrumental in the Ribera de Duero receiving official D.O. status in 1982. In 2008, the region joined the esteemed ranks of Rioja and Priorat as one of only three regions with the Denominación de Origen Calificada (DOCa) classification. He now owns 4 wineries in Spain, yet it is the estates of Pesquera and Condado de Haza that are the leading lights in his portfolio.

In the mid-1980s as Tinto Pesquera was assuming its place among the most intriguing and powerful icons in the world of wine, Alejandro spied a neglected slope along the Duero River which he felt held real potential. After lengthy and complicated negotiations with the many owners, he planted the first 50 hectares in 1989 and today the contiguous estate includes over 250 hectares of prime Tempranillo vines. Located within the historic county of the hilltop village Haza, the estate was christened Condado de Haza.

Condado de Haza reflects the bold and brilliant winemaking style of Alejandro Fernández. Bottled after malolactic fermentation and 15 months in American oak, like Tinto Pesquera, it can be enjoyed early yet will reward patient cellaring.

I loved this wine when I first tasted it, and it represents incredible value considering the winemaking talent and vineyard resources behind the wine. It is very dark in colour with lots of intriguing dark fruits and black cherries on the nose. A serious wine with a serious finish. The palate is very well balanced with fine tannins over-layering a sweet core of red fruits, spice, espresso and vanilla.

FOOD MATCHINGS

This is a big, bold wine packed with big flavours and strong tannins. With these types of wines, you want to match them with lots of protein dripping with juices. Think medium rare steaks, grilled lamb chops and roast pork. Then make sure you have a second bottle handy!

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This wine could be cellared for the next 3-5 years with no difficulty. When drinking now, decant for 20 minutes before serving.



ABOUT THE SOMMELIER



Adrian Filuta - Sommelier at "The Paddington" part of the Merivale Group

I grew up with wine on the table; hand made by my grandfather from our family's vineyard in Romania. However I didn't take wine seriously until much later when I was working in a restaurant in London with a great wine list, which prompted me to start my journey through the Court of Masters Sommeliers program. Beside the fact that I'm emotionally attached to this country and its wines, as it's where I come from, Romania is an interesting country with a great history of winemaking and a deep wine culture. (It's reputation has suffered in recent years mainly due to the political state of the country over the last century). Despite its great

history of winemaking, over 4000 years, today's industry is in a stage of revival with a lot of exciting winemakers crafting fantastic wines. To me one of the leading winemakers is Bogdan Costachescu from DAVINO, who makes Iacob Red a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon with the native Feteasca Neagra, the wine I have chosen for this selection. A native to Dealu Mare, Bogdan trained in Bordeaux for a few years where he developed the love for the Bordeaux varietals. DAVINO was started in the early 90's with the goal of making a wine that expresses the best of Romanian terroir. After more than 20 years they are paving the way for the future of Romanian wine.

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The Condado de Haza estate is one of four wineries owned by Alejandro Fernández, a winemaker whose flagship wine Pesquera (also from Ribera del Duero) is regarded as one of Spain's top wines. This is a serious benchmark wine from a world famous winemaker and I am sure it will become one of your favourites. The 2011 vintage is pure Tempranillo and sensational. The palate is very well balanced with a sweet core of red fruit, with prominent vanilla oak.

The Languedoc is the engine room of the French industry, a bit like the Riverina and Riverland in Australia. It is responsible for lakes of cheap and cheerful "vin de pay". However there are pockets of brilliance, where old family growers are striving to create something special and distinctive. Wines that are deep in colour, full-bodied and offering distinctive flavours of provincial herbs and spices that make them so attractive; when made well.

Château de Lascaux is nestled in Pic Saint-Loup, just north of Montpellier in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France. The vineyards have been in the family for 13 generations, and span 85 hectares surrounded by 300 hectares of forests filled with oak, pine and garrigue. They are also farmed organically which adds to the overall quality and character of the wines.

Garrigue refers to the low-growing vegetation that grows on the hills of the Mediterranean coast. It is a collection of bushy, fragrant plants growing wild; such as juniper, thyme, rosemary and lavender. There is no denying that these aromas and flavours find their way into the wines of the region.

The **2013 Chateau De Lascaux Languedoc** is a sensational wine. A blend of Syrah, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Medium to full bodied, it is the complexity and structure on the palate that make this wine such a joy to drink.

The fourth wine is from Romania, yes they do make wine there. In fact it might surprise you to know, Romania is one of the largest producers in the world and the 11th largest in Europe, with over 187,000 hectares under vine. So where are all these wines sold. Most of the production is sold locally, but since joining the EU in 2007, exports have become a major feature. Like a lot of Eastern Europe, they are still trying to shake off the shackles of Soviet / Communist control and practices, but there has been a huge influx of investment into wineries and vineyards over the

past 10-15 years and the quality of the wine is really improving. Adrian is originally from Romania and he brings an excellent knowledge of region's wines. In fact Adrian's knowledge and interest has extended to importing the wine into Australia.

Romania has the coolest sounding wine region in the world, Transylvania. I was devastated to discover that the atmospheric, wooded hills of Transylvania in the middle of the country are the source of haunting white wines and not red wines. What! Surely the home of Dracula should be the source of the country's best red wines, but alas, this is not the case. Thankfully Adrian has selected a wine from Davino in the Dealu Mare region, the heart of red wine country.

With a definite nod to the international markets, all their wines are a blend of indigenous grape varieties and the better known international grapes. Davino, also has access to some of the oldest vineyards in the area. (35- 60 years). Organic and biodynamic practices are employed, maintaining a perfect biological balanced ecosystem, with all the vineyard work carried out by hand. With no expenses being spared in the vineyard and winery, it is no real surprise it is considered the top winery in Romania.

The 2013 Iacob Red is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and the indigenous Grape variety Feteasca Neagra. It has the structure, weight and characteristics of a great Bordeaux, but with a slight new world focus. Very clean fruit flavours and great oak and tannin integration.

I can't think of anywhere else in the world where you will have the opportunity to drink some of the best wines from Australia, France, Spain and Romania, without leaving your house!

Thanks Adrian.

Matt – The Bullionaire



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan