

the bullionaire

BULLION 16C

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Grenache but not as you know it!

Kim Bickley is back on the spittoon this quarter. Kim has recently taken some maternity leave to look after her new son Jackson; a good looking kid by the way, so I was glad she could devote some time and some wines to us. Both Kim and I love Grenache and when we worked out the first 2 red wines were from this grape variety, she decided to make it a trifecta and take a look at Grenache and all its beauty for the reds in this pack.

Grenache is a seriously under rated grape variety, but at Bullion Cellars we have always been a bit of a fan, sending out a number of GSM blends from France and the Rhone Valley. For this pack however, Kim has decided to look at Spain and the USA.

Grenache is an unlikely hero of a grape. Until recently it has been at best ignored and at worst reviled. The reason for Grenache's anonymity is twofold. Firstly; until recently it was the second most planted grape variety in the world. This should have made it famous, however it was and still is, responsible for a huge number of generic branded wines, where the price and pretty label are more important than what is in the bottle. In other words bloody boring wines. The second is that it is very seldom bottled by itself, rather it is seen as a blend, such as Grenache Shiraz Mourvedre, or as we know them in Australia; GSM. But when Grenache is treated with love and respect, with older, lower yielding vines, it produces some of the best and most expensive wines of the world. The great wines of Chateauneuf-du-Pape and Priorat are both Grenache based and those wines are certainly not boring.

I have had a love affair with Grenache ever since I tried my first bottle of Nine Popes in the late 1990's. This began my journey into the Cote Du Rhone and then the odd bottle of Chateauneuf-du-pape. (When I could afford it). If you are not familiar with Charles Melton and his Nine Popes GSM blend, then you need to grab a bottle. It is one of the benchmark wines of Australia. I loved the elegance and sophistication of these Grenache based wines, and then in the mid 2000's I discovered the Garnacha based wines of Priorat and my love affair was complete. I can safely say this is my favourite wine style and the grape variety making up most of my cellar.

To me there is a feminine nature to the best examples of Grenache. They are not big and blokey, like Shiraz and Cabernet can be, nor are they like Miss Universe beauties, with big hair, big teeth and big ball gowns. Good Grenache is like a high end fashionista; edgy a little dangerous, but very desirable. Maybe I have taken this analogy a little far, but there really is an elegance and sophistication to these wines that I love and enjoy.

A brief history of Grenache. Until recently it was the second most planted grape variety in the world, and still accounts for the largest planting of red grapes in both Spain and France. It was one of the first varieties to be introduced to Australia in the 18th century, eventually becoming the most



widely planted red wine grape variety until it was surpassed by Shiraz in the mid 1960s. A lot of great Old Vine Grenache was ripped out during the Vine Pull of the early 1980's, but thankfully some vineyard owners held out and these vines form the basis of the great GSM's of the Barossa and McLaren Vale (Charles Melton Nine Popes and D'Arenberg are two examples). In the 19th century, California wine growers prized the vine's ability to produce high yields and withstand heat and drought conditions, where it was extensively planted throughout central California and used as a blending component for sweet jug wines. In the late 20th century, the Rhone Ranger movement brought attention to the production of higher quality GSM blends and the first wine Kim has chosen is just such an example. The Rhone Ranger movement is a cool name for a cool style of wines and a great way to gain the attention of US consumers where Cabernet and Chardonnay are king.

But it is not in the Napa where you will find these "Rhone Ranger" wines, it is in "Sideways" Country. It is nearly 12 years since this movie was released and it is still being talked about and referenced in the US. It allowed the wine regions of the Central Coast to flex their muscle and show to the US and the world that great wines can be found outside the Napa Valley.

The **2014 Hahn Central Valley GSM** is a great example. Their vineyards are based around the towns of Monterey and Santa Lucia, where the coastal influences moderate the warm temperatures, or as they like to say in their brochures, "Miles of coastline, endless sunny hills and relaxing wineries." These are not the showpiece wineries of venture capitalists or IT Billionaires. This area is all about authentic wine families and their vineyards.

The Hahn is a typical blend of 65% Grenache, 31% Syrah, 4% Mourvèdre, this is a real crowd pleaser and sure to bring a smile to your face.

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bullion CELLARS
SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES

2016 COMYN & CO - 'MRS WHITE' *Hunter Valley*



Viognier / Semillon / Fiano

Scott and Missy Comyns are the husband and wife team behind the bold and edgy Hunter Valley wine brand Comyns & Co. Scott has worked 14 years in and around the Hunter Valley, including a number of international vintages. When he was made redundant in 2015, he decided to strike out on his own and with some family backing launched Comyns and Co. Their focus is the Hunter Valley and small batch winemaking. Kim and I tasted a number of his white wines, but we kept on going back to the Mrs White, a rather unusual blend of Viognier, Semillon and Fiano.

It was obvious the wine uses impeccable fruit quality, but what we really enjoyed was the touch of barrel aging which really shines through on the nose and palate. It adds another dimension and level of complexity to these aromatic varieties.

The wine is full of stone fruits, vanilla and spice, with this complex silky texture. The richness of this wine is balanced with a fresh citrus length.

The Semillon - was sourced from a great little parcel from the "Amy Block" vineyard. This is top Semillon site in the Hunter and it looks great in the blend.

The Viognier is from younger vines Scott stumbled across while checking out another variety. He decided to ferment and age in French oak, and it is this component that adds to the complexity of the young wine. Very vibrant and floral. **The Fiano** - was the last of the whites to ripen and spent two days on skins before being pressed. This added a texture to the Fiano, which is so evident in the final blend.

A beautiful wine from a winery and winemaker to keep an eye on.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Seafoods and white meats would be an ideal match. Thai and Japanese as well. A very versatile wine.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

2-3 years in the cellar would be nice, but I will be enjoying this wine over the next 6 months. A great wine heading into the warmer months.



2014 HAHN CENTRAL COAST GSM *USA*

65% Grenache, 31% Syrah, 4% Mourvèdre

Since 1980 the Hahn family have cultivated their hillside vineyards in Monterey County of Central California. They are now onto their second generation and in a state and country where Chardonnay and Cabernet are King, it is the "Rhône Blends" of this winery that really shine. This a typical GSM blend, but there is a richness and juiciness to this wine that you don't get in other areas. The wine is quite high in alcohol at 14.5%, but it is in balance with the fruit and will make this a real crowd pleaser.

The Grenache comes from their vineyards in Arroyo Seco, one of the smallest regions in the state, but boasting one of the longest growing seasons. In this region, warm and sunny days are followed by cool afternoons with the wind blowing in from the coast. This daily cooling effect allows for longer hang times and creates very ripe fruit, something Grenache really needs.

The defining feature of Arroyo Seco, which in Spanish means 'dry riverbed', are the large river stones which are scattered around the area, absorbing heat during the day and then radiating that heat in the evenings to prevent the vines from freezing during frigid nights. This is very similar to the "Pudding Stones" in Chateauneuf-du-pape.

The Shiraz is sourced from their cooler, higher elevated vineyards in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey. The cooler conditions are perfect for Shiraz, lending colour, tannins and hints of blueberry and black pepper to the wine. The small amount of Mourvèdre contributes richness to the mid-palate and lengthens the finish.

Designed to be a crowd pleaser, it is a rich sensuous wine of great depth. There is some fruit sweetness on the palate, but this is balanced by lively acidity and smooth soft tannins. Very pretty floral notes of violets and red cherries are evident on the aroma, but it is on the palate where this wine really shines, with hints of blackberries, coffee, and a hint of minerality.

FOOD MATCHINGS

This is a wonderful wine that will work perfectly with any food that calls out for a rich red: grilled or braised meats, roast chicken and rich cheeses. Rack of Lamb would be a great match.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This wine can be safely cellared for another 4-7 years. When drinking now, decant for 20 minutes.



2014 PALACOIS REMONDO LA VENDIMIA *Rioja, Spain*

50% Garnacha / 50% Tempranillo

Since Alvaro Palacois came back to his family estate in Rioja, the wines of Remondo have steadily been on the increase. It should be no surprise, as he is leading the charge with old vine Garnacha and he has this fastidious attention to detail. Alvaro Palacois is deeply committed to organic viticulture and natural winemaking practices, such as use of organic fertilizers in the stone-covered, clay soils. All the wines from this estate are unfiltered and clarified only with egg whites, no commercial yeasts or compounds are added to the wines and sulphites are kept to minimum levels. Total respect for his vineyard and its surrounding environment results in wines— that express the true nature of the estate’s soils. The wines are only made from estate own vineyards, which is also a rarity in Rioja.

A blend of Garnacha and Tempranillo, but following an old tradition this wine always contains around 8% of wine from the previous vintage. Alvaro feels this helps to maintain a consistency of style from one year to the other.

This is a very elegant expression of Garnacha and the most (feminine) of the examples Kim has chosen. Alvaro has done away with the normal Spanish classifications, based on the length of time spent in oak, but this is his example of a “Joven” or young wine. It spends less than 12 months in Oak and is all the better for it.

Lively and lucid, this wine has supple aromas of fresh orchard fruit and wild berries. Fruit-forward and round on the palate. It is just a joy to drink, but it is very important to serve this at the right temperature, in fact I really enjoyed this wine with a slight chill on it. Perfect heading into the warmer months. Perfumed, floral and beautifully aromatic.

FOOD MATCHINGS

A very versatile medium weight wine. This will match with most red meats, but also with some non-spicy Asian dishes. Pork Belly would be an awesome match.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

This wine is designed to be consumed within the next 3 years. Decant for 10 minutes and remember to serve it at the right temperature - 14-16 degrees Celsius.



2013 CAPCANES “LE SENDAL” *Montsant, Spain*

Garnacha 85% Syrah 15%

Capcanes is Co-op winery but not as we know it. Co-op’s are normally a haven for thin weedy wines, where little love or attention is devoted to the wines. This used to be the case at Capcanes, until 1995. It was at this time that the wines of Priorat were starting to gain a lot of attention, and a group of growers realised that bulk wine was not the direction to follow.

They needed to focus on premium wines and for that they needed to pay the growers on quality and not just yield, plus they needed to invest in a new winery and the oak needed for quality wines. These wines were to be viticulturally-driven, based on rigorous yield management from dry-grown old bush-vines. This was an extraordinary risk on the part of extremely poor peasant farmers – a desperate leap of faith, which has paid off wonderfully.

There were a few growing pains along the way, with the exclusion of a number of growers who did not want to follow this process.

La Sendal’ means “the path’ and indicates the site halfway up the mountain to the towering Cabrida vineyards (Cabrida being the nimble mountain goat

going up the high mountain passes where the old limestone Cabrida vineyards reside). Le Sendal spends 9 months in US barriques and is a blend of Garnacha with 15% Syrah.

This is quite a savoury expression of Grenache/Garnacha and is a lovely glass of wine. This wine will really benefit from decanting and matching with the right food. The structure of the wine really demands a nice meal.

There are lots of the heady balsamic regional character that you get with wines from this area of Spain. The fruit is juicy and fleshy with very judicious oak, totally incorporated into the wine, adding to the length and structure of the wine and creating a sensational mouthfeel.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Roast meats, Chicken lamb or pork would be a very safe bet.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking. Can be safely cellared for the next 5-8 years.



ABOUT THE SOMMELIER

Kim Bickley is one of the top Sommeliers in the country, previously working at “Hatted” restaurants Glass Brasserie 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. She is also the mother of Jackson!

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The next two wines are Grenache dominated wines from Spain, one from Rioja, the other from Montsant on the East Coast. Just to confuse you in Spain, it is known as Garnacha.

Alvaro Palacois is the one of the most famous wine makers in the world. In 2015 the UK magazine Decanter named him Wine Person of the year and that is considered one his minor achievements. He made his name and his fortune in the hilly mountains of Priorat, but his family and roots are well and truly found in Rioja, in north, central Spain.

Palacios Remondo is the family estate in the Yerga Valley near Alfaro. Alvaro was the seventh of nine children, so he left the family estate in 1989 to start his own wine adventure. Working in the Prestige estates of **Petrus** in Bordeaux and **Stags Leap** in California, it was here that he learned the attention to detail which would change his vision of wine forever.

He was one of five winemakers who re-discovered the old vines of Priorat and in 1993 he purchased the **L’Ermita** vineyard which would become his signature wine. (To give you an idea of his fame, the 2010 vintage of this single vineyard wine is for sale in Australia for \$2000.)

After all the fame and attention, he returned to his family Rioja estate in 2000, after the death of his father. The family have 110 hectares and under Alvaro’s guidance, the vineyards and wines have undergone extraordinary change. He has converted all the vineyards into Organic and Biodynamic, concentrating on ancient bush vine Garnacha (the Local term for Grenache) rather than the normal Tempranillo. Alvaro is also concentrating on the higher altitude vineyards on the estate above 550-650 metres. All this has resulted in a dramatic increase in the quality at the Palacios Remondo estate. The wine Kim has chosen, the 2014 **La Vendimia Rioja**, is a 50:50 blend of Garnacha and Tempranillo and is a great example of the modern Rioja. Gone are the tried, flabby wines that were over oaked and over aged. Now, you have these lovely floral, elegant wines that are just beguiling. This is not a big wine and medium bodied at best, but it has this structure and complexity that make it a joy to drink.

The Third Grenache wine is from the Region of Montsant and a winery by the name of Capçanes (pronounced Cap-sar-ness). Montsant surrounds the more famous and more expensive DOQ Priorat, and whilst they do not have the complexity and structure of the top wines, they produce amazing wines at a fraction of the price and in some cases, better quality. Capçanes is both the name of a small Montsant village and also the name of its wine co-op. They manage 190 hectares (owned by 75 growers) and represent about 10% of the regions total production. About half of these vineyards are organic, with more vineyards converted each year. Yields are kept very low and they have centenary Garnacha vines, which account

for 55% of the co-ops holdings. It is safe to say that this is a region where Garnacha is king, or more appropriately queen. The wine Kim has chosen is the **2013 Capçanes “Le Sendal” Montsant**, an extremely elegant and restrained Garnacha (Grenache) with 15% Syrah adding a little spice and colour. Most of the vineyards in Montsant are found on the valley floors, but the better vineyards are found on the slopes and this is where the “Le Senda,” is sourced.

Continuing the theme of blended wines, Kim has chosen a sensational Hunter Valley White wine blend. The Hunter Valley is going through a renaissance at the moment. Wine quality is up and sales are increasing. I have a real soft spot for the Hunter, as this is the region that gave me my first start in the wine industry. During most of the 1990’s and early 2000’s the mid weight Shiraz from the Hunter was out of fashion, but thanks to some youngish winemakers, stretching the boundary and the acceptance by most of the larger winemakers that their cellars were infected by a nasty little bugger called Brettanomyces or ‘Brett’, they have really turned the corner. And this is before you even start to talk about the Semillon and Chardonnay. “Brett” is a yeast infection that gives off an earthy and rustic aroma or sometimes the smell of freshly opened “Band Aids”. In small doses it can be considered a feature, adding character to the wine, but in larger doses it is a wine fault. Most Hunter Valley produces now accept that what they used to call “Sweaty Saddle” and a positive descriptor for their wines, was in fact Brett and a fault. To eradicate Brett from a winery is a rather costly exercise, as all the oak barrels need to be replaced, as well as a complete sterilization of the winery.

The Hunter have also been greeted by two pretty sensational vintages in 2013 and 2014 for their red wines, so stock up.

Kim also has a soft spot for the Hunter, with her new partner and father of her child, being Andrew Thomas, one of the most respected and awarded winemakers in the area. He is one of the “Youngish” winemakers I was talking about.

Kim has chosen an even younger wine and winemaker with the **2016 Comyn & Co ‘Mrs White’ Viognier / Semillon / Fiano**. An unusual blend, but it is a stunner. So fresh and vibrant and continues a trend of aging a portion of these aromatic grape varieties with oak to increase the complexity and structure of the younger wines.

So there you have our Grenache Pack. Great wines and great stories to tell.

Enjoy the dinner parties and the wines with your friends and family.

Matt, The Bullionaire