

the bullionaire

BULLION 17A

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In Good Company ...

Matt Dunne is the group Sommelier of the Solotel Group, a new joint Venture between Matt Moran and Bruce Solomon, who between them manage 26 outlets, mainly around Sydney. These include the iconic ARIA and CHISWICK restaurants. I also just found out his wife is on a new cooking show on the SBS. I am not sure where he finds the time to eat, let alone drink, but thankfully he does. He has an amazing palate and access to some really good booze.

The first wine Matt has chosen is one which may be familiar to long term members. Over the past 6 years Matt has developed his own wine label with Mac Forbes, a winemaker from the Yarra Valley and Nicholas Crampton, an importer based in Sydney. The result is a label called Drake Samson, focusing on 2 wines from key vineyards around the Yarra Valley - A Chardonnay and a Pinot Noir.

Matt has chosen the **2015 Drake Samson Pinot Noir - Yarra Valley**. Only 280 cases were produced of this wine, and I get the feeling Matt drinks a lot of it. After tasting the wine with him, I can see why. Pinot Noir is really on trend at the moment, filling wine lists and bottle shops alike. People cannot seem to get enough, but it is a finicky grape which is very particular about where it is grown and how it is made. There are plenty of thin, weedy wines from young fruit and even younger winemakers. Thankfully Drake Samson is a great example of what happens when you have a great mix of talents and vineyards.

Mac Forbes was considered one of the young guns of the Australian Wine industry, but like most of us, he is maturing very nicely thank you. Mac's early career was spent in Europe, where he developed a strong understanding of the international wine market and traditional winemaking. Returning to Australia in 2004, Mac kicked off his own project determined to marry some of the old world philosophies adapted to his first love, the Yarra Valley. Matt and Mac (maybe that is what they should have called the label) share a belief in creating thought-provoking wines of individual character and expression. Drake Samson turns Mac's normal individual vineyard philosophy on its head, as they have blended wines from three vineyards in the Yarra Valley, creating a style perfect for our modern cuisine.

The Loire Valley is one of the largest wine regions in France, but quite possibly the least famous. It does not have one identity or one wine style like Bordeaux, rather it is spread over a large and diverse region and produces a wide range of wine styles. The Loire River is the longest in France, traversing across the middle of the country. It is perhaps, more famous for its spectacular Chateaux's and tourists attractions than its wine, but the wines do offer great quality and value. The key red grape varieties of the Loire are Cabernet Franc and Gamay. The key white grape varieties are Melon de Bourgogne, Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc. But it is Chenin Blanc we want to talk about.



The high acidity of Chenin Blanc means it can be made into a range of styles from austere and mineral to rich, honeyed, and sweet. It also makes a sensational Sparkling wine. Across the Loire Valley you will see all these styles, although it can produce very bland neutral wines, if the natural vigour of the vines are not controlled. They also seem to benefit from a few years in the bottle.

It is probably due to this diversity that Chenin Blanc is not more highly regarded. But today, wine enthusiasts know that Chenin Blanc produces stunning dry wines in all price ranges, with the Loire Valley being the ancestral home. You will also find good examples in South Africa, whilst in Australia it is more of a novelty, with Western Australia and Margaret River making some nice wines.

The wine Matt has chosen is the **2013 Le Rocher des Violettes "Touche Mitaine" Montlouis, Loire Valley**. Long name and hard to pronounce but easy to drink.

Montlouis is the region located near Vouvray in the Touraine part of the Loire Valley (Chenin Blanc territory). Xavier Weisskopf is part of a new generation of younger producers, buying into appellations which are a little off the beaten track. In 2005 he was able to purchase a 9 hectare estate, with some of the vines planted pre 1940. Something he would never have been able to do in the better known region of Vouvray. Xavier prefers wines which are fresh, mineral and long, rather than fat, so these are wines made with a light touch showing wonderfully pure and lifted aromatics with freshness and precision. Toasty, honey, melon dew characters are seen on both the aroma and palate, but it is the textural elements and complexity of this wine which make it so enjoyable. It really evolves and changes in the glass. At only 12% alcohol, it is not full bodied, rather it is a mid-weight wine, but one that packs plenty of flavour and texture.

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SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES



2015 PAGO DE LOS CAPELLANES, "JOVEN" *Ribera Del Deuro - Spain*

The name means 'land of the chaplains', a reminder that the land was once owned by the Church until it was donated back to the city council in 1855. (They have a bit of history in Europe).

The Rodero-Villa family have been grape growers in the area since 1980, however it was in 1996 that they committed to a new winery and really began the modern interpretation of this estate. In less than 20 years Pago de los Capellanes has reached the status reserved for Ribera del Duero's greatest bodegas, dominated by the region's oldest wineries, such as Vega Sicilia and Alejandro Fernández.

The vineyard is divided into 35 plots that are vinified separately. The soils which produce these wines are found at an altitude of 800 meters above sea level and are clay-lime, with very little productive potential, which makes the vines take root deep into the earth. They face very hot summers (up to 45°C) and very cold winters (0°) with a rainfall level of around 500ml per year. Similarly, during the harvest the thermal contrasts between day and night are also extreme, benefiting the grape ripening process, strengthening the alcoholic content, the colour and the tannins, and even more importantly, maintaining a balanced acidity. The diurnal temperature which is so vital for great wine growing regions.

This 'Joven' or young wine, is a blend from 20 plots with five months of ageing in new 300-litre French oak casks. The nose is full of violets and liquorice, with dark berry fruit characters. Energy and vitality flow over the palate and this pure Tempranillo (or Tinto Fino as it is called in Ribera) is full, elegant, velvety and tasty.

I can see why this winery is regarded as one of the region's top producers.

FOOD MATCHINGS

The obvious food pairing with Tempranillo wine is to go with Spanish style dishes, tapas and Chorizo anyone. It would also be sensational with jamon or dry cured ham. My favourite though is grilled or roast lamb.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 10-15 minutes. This wine is designed for short term cellaring, 1-3 years, but ideally should be drunk within the next 12-18 months.



2015 DRAKE SAMSON PINOT NOIR *Yarra Valley - Australia*

This is a collaboration between the Yarra Valley's Mac Forbes and our own sommelier Matt Dunne. It was born from a shared belief in creating thought-provoking wines of individual character and expression. Drake Samson turns Mac's normal individual vineyard philosophy on its head, blending the best from specific vineyards to create a style perfect for modern Australian cuisine.

The wine has been sourced from three vineyards - "Yarra Junction" which gives a firm tannin profile and sour cherry notes. The 114 clone from the warmer "Coldstream" vineyard gives palate density but high-toned spicy notes, whilst the "Seville" vineyard fruit again gives aromatic lift and restraint, balancing the firm tannins with crunchy red fruits. There is about 10% whole cluster across the board, providing softer tannins and a great elegance, with partial foot stooping and both new and old French oak used (Mercurie and Moreau barrels).

Lifted aromatics of red berries, forest undergrowth and high toned spicy notes. The palate displays the classic Mac Forbes interplay between fruit and bright crunchy acid. Medium bodied flavours of ripe cranberry and red berry fruit have sufficient intensity to ensure the wine finishes with a fruit driven flourish.

FOOD MATCHINGS

The most perfect match will be duck and mushroom based dishes (risottos etc.) Also try dishes such as crispy duck pancakes, grilled quail, pork, seared salmon and tuna. Barbecue meats can also be matched with ease.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking. This wine can be safely cellared for the next 3-5 years.



2013 LE ROCHER DES VIOLETTES “TOUCHE MITAINE” *Montlouis, Loire Valley - France* - ORGANIC WINE

Xavier Weisskopf is one of the new generation of young producers buying into appellations in the Loire that are less developed and explored, enabling his purchase in 2005 of a 6.8 hectare vineyard in Montlouis, Touraine.

He has gradually increased his holdings to the current 13 ha of vines, with 9 ha of vines in Montlouis (this appellation just south of the Loire from Vouvray being 100% Chenin Blanc on soils that are sandier than Vouvray).

The entire estate is farmed organically without the use of any chemicals or artificial fertilisers. With most of his vineyards being planted pre-1940 the yields are naturally low and all harvesting is done by hand. Xavier prefers wines that are fresh, mineral and long rather than fat so these are wines made with a light touch showing wonderfully pure and lifted aromatics.

The 2013 'Touche Mitaine' is a 100% Chenin blanc sourced from his younger vines (averaging 35 years old). Organic Winemaking procedures are followed, meaning there are no additions or chemicals used, except for minimal sulphur at time of bottling. Only native yeasts are used to ferment the wine and it is aged for 8 months in new and old barrels.

There is slight mineral character to the nose, with a soft perfume, reminiscent of honey dew melon. It has a very gentle palate that does not whack you around the head, rather it has lovely stone fruit and toasty honeyed characters, offering a sensational textural feel. It's full of flavour and quite intense, in that lovely Chenin way, with a precise balance between the fruit and the acidity. This wine certainly punches well above its 12% alcohol, which only makes it easier to open the second bottle and not be too tipsy.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Seafood is a natural choice — Think prawns, oysters and simple grilled fish.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

I would recommend decanting this wine for a few minutes before pouring. Organic wines made in a reductive way with minimal exposure to air, can feel a little stuffy and closed when first opened. Let it breathe and then enjoy.

This wine already has a few years under its belt, so I would recommend short term cellaring, 2-3 years, but ideally I would drink within 12-18 months.



2015 LES VIGNERONS D' ESTÉZARGUES *Domaine des Fees Cotes Du Rhone - France* - ORGANIC WINE

The Field of Fairies. A great name from this Small co-op producer. Small and co-op do not normally go together, but this producer in the heart of the Cotes Du Rhone focuses on Single vineyard wines, from 10 local growers.

On the heels of the single cuvée evolution Les Vignerons D' Estézargues began to practice natural winemaking. Possibly one of the only co-ops in the world to do so. Les Vignerons D' Estézargues uses no external yeasts, no filtering, no fining and no enzymes are used on the grapes during the winemaking process. They use minimal sulphur at time of bottling, but the wines are clean and pristine, but pack plenty of flavour.

A blend of roughly 50:50 Syrah and Grenache that drinks well above its price point. The wine sees no oak, but rather maturation in Stainless steel. The idea is to retain the purity of the fruit. It is a medium bodied wine that packs a bit of a punch. It has all of Syrah's meaty-smoky characteristics, with heady spice, dense black fruit, Grenache's cherry lift and a touch of anise, all wrapped up with velvety tannins.

A lot of organic and Natural winemaking can focus a little too much on the process and forget about the most important thing. That the wine has to taste great. This wine and this winery is a great example of what modern natural viticulture should be: making the most of modern techniques available whilst at the same time focusing on an environmentally friendly method of production.

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. When in doubt always match Cotes Du Rhone with grilled meats.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking, this wine can be safely cellared for the next 3-5 years.

ABOUT THE SOMMELIER



Matthew Dunne

Aria, Sydney, Brisbane / Chiswick / Chiswick Art Galley / North Bondi Fish

In the past 15 years of his professional life as a sommelier, Matt Dunne's career has covered a multitude of areas such as managing fine dining restaurants, creating wine lists, food retail merchandising and food and wine training.

Matt's role now as Group Sommelier for Solotel, has him in charge of the commercial, creative and training aspects of the wine program for the groups 26 outlets, which includes the award winning 1100 bottle wine list at ARIA Sydney and ARIA Brisbane's 550 bottle wine list and of course everyone's favourite "local" Chiswick.

Matt completed the Court of Masters Sommeliers Certified Sommelier Examination in 2009. Matt is an active wine show judge and in 2015 he was awarded a scholarship to the prestigious Len Evans Tutorial, held annually in the Hunter Valley. He is experienced as a keynote speaker, educator and has a fresh and approachable take on wine.

Matt also has his own Yarra Valley wine project featuring Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, which is now in its sixth year, Drake Sampson.

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Matt's next wine is from one of our favourite regions. The Cotes Du Rhone in France, home to Grenache based wines in all their glory. They are not big wines full of aggressive tannins and lashings of oak; rather they are wines of elegance, sophistication and grace. **The 2015 Les Vignerons D' Estézargues Domaine des Fees Cotes Du Rhone** is a great example.

Les Vignerons D' Estézargues is a co-operative winery in the small town of Estézargues, located in the heart of the Cotes du Rhone, near Avignon. In most regions of France the co-op still plays a very important role in the production and sale of wine, but at the lower end of the market – Cheap and Cheerful. They generally make large quantities of wines with grapes from many different vineyards. Les Vignerons D' Estézargues is a very different animal. They started in 1995 when ten different growers formed this co-op and began to vinify their wine separately and make single vineyard wines from their best plots.

Domaine Des Fees, or Field of the Fairies, is such a wine, made from a single estate located just west of Lirac. (Older members will remember this region from previous selections) It is very typical of the better soils of the appellation: South facing vineyards, with pebbles and rocks, over clay subsoil. This estate is one of the pioneers of organic viticulture in the area and they are 100% committed to their soils and estate. This means no chemicals or additives are used in the vineyard or winery, with only a small amount of sulphur dioxide added at the time of bottling.

It is made from equal parts Grenache and Syrah and aged completely in concrete tanks, with no oak. It is not a big wine, but offers gorgeous notes of roasted meats, Provencal herbs, red fruits and a touch of liquorice. Medium bodied and juicy, with a velvety texture. A sign of a good wine is when it tastes even better the next day, which is what happened, when I drank the rest of the bottle the night after my tasting with Matt. **Here is a tip:** If you have an unfinished bottle of wine (red or white), replace the cork or screw cap and put it in the fridge. The cold will prevent oxidation and you can enjoy the wine for the next 1-2 days.

Spain; the final frontier. Well not really, but certainly the home to some sensational wines. Spain, at the moment, is where I tend to find the most exciting wines and producers. Their quality is on par with anything in France, Italy or Australia, yet in most cases, at a fraction of the price. Thankfully the Chinese have not discovered the wines of Spain, like they have Bordeaux and Burgundy, so good value and great quality are still very achievable.

The wine Matt has chosen is the **2015 Pago de los Capellanes, Joven, Ribera Del Deuro.**

The Ribera de Duero is one of the three most recognised regions of Spain, the others being Rioja and Priorat. Ribera del Duero is a relatively new region from this trio, located in North central Spain. It has a bleak landscape with flat-topped rocky heights and an average altitude of 700-800 metres. In 1982 there were only 14 estates in Ribera del Duero; (now there are more than 300), but thankfully two of those estates were Vega Sicilia and Alejandro Fernández's Pesquera Estate. (Two of the great wine estates of the world). It was also in 1982 that Robert Parker took a liking to Pesquera and Ribera del Duero was suddenly not just on the map, but reaching for the stars.

Fast forward 30 odd years and these 300 estates are at the forefront of Spanish and world winemaking. Like most regions during the 1990's, they strived for high alcohol and big over the top wines, trying to secure high "Parker Points". Thankfully the wines of today are characterised by finesse and elegance, plus the Oak is far less prominent and more integrated.

Pago de los Capellanes is considered one of the shining lights of the modern Ribera. In little more than twenty years, they have reached the level where Vega Sicilia and Alejandro Fernández sit. They turned a rundown estate, with little more than a few thousand vines, into a 125 hectare estate with all the bells and whistles. The Rodero – Villa family have earned their reputation as winemakers and producers who are committed to their terroir.

Their 2015 Joven or Young wine is a great example of what makes this producer and region so special. Made from 100% Tempranillo and spending only 5 months in New French Oak, this wine is loaded with juicy, red fruit flavours with a touch of creamy vanilla, black pepper and exotic sweet spices. Just a joy to drink.

So there you have Matt's selection and as I finish this newsletter, I am reminded of a great saying by Len Evans, "You only have so many bottles in your life, so never drink a bad one."

Enjoy!

**Matt,
The Bullionaire**



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan

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