

the bullionaire

BULLION 17D

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Pinot Noir really is the new black ...

Pinot Noir is on trend at the moment, but I will tell you a little secret, I don't drink a lot of these wines. This is not because I don't love Pinot, rather it is because of their very poor value ratio. When most Reserve style bottlings start at \$80, it is pretty hard to find a great Pinot that does not break the bank. Plus don't even get me started on the wines of Burgundy. I have purchased plenty of Premier Crus above \$150 and in most cases have been pretty disappointed. However, you cannot deny the seductive charm of these "Divas" of the wine world and they have become wines you need in your cellar.

Pinot Noir is the "Wine Wankers" wine of choice, as you can talk for hours on the virtues of a single vineyard Pinot from a trendy cool climate region, discussing ad nauseam the clones panted and how much whole bunch fermentation the winemaker has used. It also helps when the most expensive wine on the planet is made from Pinot Noir. *(If you didn't know, I am referring to Domaine Romanée-Conti's, Romanée-Conti Grand Cru, with the current vintage setting you back around \$20,000 if you can find it.)*

Thank heavens for our Sommeliers, as good value Pinot can be found; it is just not easy.

But why are they so expensive? There are a number of reasons, but in reality it comes down to two; Supply and Demand.

In the overall scheme of things, there is not very much Pinot Noir produced. It is in fact a finicky and difficult variety to grow. It has a very thin skin, which means they are sensitive to temperature fluctuations and are very susceptible to various rot and funguses. They also require a cooler climate which results in lower yields. This means you have very expensive and intensive vineyard practices, before you even get into the winery. Then over the past 10 years there has been an increasing demand for Pinot, which seems to have a "Cool Factor" that Cabernet and Shiraz just don't have, highlighted by the growing preference for lighter styles of wines and the increased quality of the Pinots from the new world (NZ/AUST / USA). All this, unfortunately, results in expensive wine.

Dan has chosen a great Pinot Noir from a pioneer of the Adelaide Hills. The **2016 Ashton Hill Piccadilly Pinot Noir**. As James Halliday has



reported "[Ashton Hills] is the most distinguished site in South Australia for Pinot Noir; Stephen's unremitting attention to detail has made Ashton Hills the one Grand Cru of the state."

The white wine in this selection ticks a lot of boxes. It is an Organic Dry Riesling from one of the prime regions of Germany, the Rheinhessen. The use of words like Organic and Biodynamic have become very passé over the past few years, as producers jump on the bandwagon and increase their prices. But these terms are not worth the label they are printed on if the wines are not any good. Thankfully this wine is. We are talking about the **2016 Dreissigacker Organic Troken Riesling Rheinhessen**. (Troken indicates the wine is Dry).

There is a general impression in the marketplace that Rieslings are a sweet wine, but the reality is most Rieslings we drink in Australia are bone dry. These are wines which are perfect for modern Australian cuisine with an Asian slant. They can handle the strong flavours and spices with ease. Germany and Alsace are the spiritual home of Riesling, yet Australia is not far behind. The dry Rieslings of the Clare Valley (Watervale) are world class. *(One a side note, a number of Australian producers are experimenting with slightly sweeter styles, referred to as "Off Dry".*

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SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES



2016 ASHTON HILL PICCADILLY PINOT NOIR *Adelaide Hills, SA*

Stephen George is an unknown icon of the Australian Wine industry. He was the pioneer of cool climate viticulture in South Australia, running against the then trend of big over the top Barossa and McLaren Vale Shiraz. He decided to concentrate on Pinot Noir from the then unfashionable Piccadilly Valley of the Adelaide Hills. He first planted his tiny 6 acre vineyard in 1982 and at this time, there was only Brian Croser of Petaluma in the region.

You don't need to spend much time in the Piccadilly Valley to realise why this area was granted sub-regional status—it is totally different to the rest of the Hills. In short, it's much colder and wetter. George's Estate vineyard lies at 570 metres above sea level and the vines shudder through some of the coolest vintage conditions in the country. Perfect conditions for high quality Pinot Noir. A healthy portion of old-vines and the vineyard's south-facing aspect also play a significant role in the personality of these wines.

Three Piccadilly sites made the cut for this blend: the Ashton Hills vineyard; Jim Grigg's Cemetery Block at Uraidla; and the Bickles Road, Summertown block which is managed by the Blefari family.

For the "Pinotophiles" out there, here are the wine's technical details.

"The fruit is destemmed via a small, customised, gentle destemmer that keeps most of the berries intact. Just as they have done for decades, the wines ferment on their natural yeasts. The fruit is then basket pressed, and the wine is raised without any sulphur additions until bottling. Some whole bunches are included, and the percentage varies according to the style of the vintage. This latest vintage is matured predominantly in seasoned French oak and there are five different clones contributing to the blend."

FOOD MATCHINGS

The combination of great acidity, silky tannins and subtle flavours are what makes Pinot Noir so successful for pairing with a tremendous variety of foods. Pinot Noir is light enough for salmon but complex enough to hold up to some richer meat including duck, game birds and course stews like beef bourguignon. In a pinch, when everyone orders a vastly different entree at a restaurant, you can usually win by picking Pinot Noir; it will make everyone happy. A great match for Roast turkey.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Drink now or cellar for five years. — Decant for 20 minutes before serving.



2015 MAURO MOLINO BARBERA D'ALBA *Piedmont, Italy*

In the Langhe region of Piedmont, Nebbiolo is king, however you cannot overlook the wines of Barbera d'Alba. These are bright and fresh wines and a great example of how a grape variety has found the right region. Whilst Barbera is planted in other countries, it is really only in the regions around the town of Alba where they create wines of great interest and quality.

Some of these wines are made in a more "New World" style with aging in oak barriques, but most are made in a more traditional style with little to no oak, as the oak can overpower the fruit. This wine from the great Mauro Molino is an example of the latter.

Azienda Agricola Mauro Molino is a family run business. The property was purchased by Giuseppe Molino in 1953. However, Giuseppe's son Mauro Molino, an expert winemaker, did not begin the actual production of wines until 1982 with his first Barolo vintage. It took him a while to bring the vineyards he inherited from his father up to speed, and raise the capital required to fund the venture. The Third generation has come on board with Mauro's son Mateo joining the business in 2003 and then by his sister Martina in 2010. They have gained a strong following for the quality of the wines, especially their Barolo's, but their Barbera D'Alba is always one of their most enjoyable and their biggest seller.

The wine has a vibrant and attractive deep ruby colour. It's both aromatic and savoury at the same time. As it opens up, the fruit really kicks in with bright cherry, raspberry and red berry notes emerging. Being Italian, it also has some liquorice, spice and "tariness" as well. The mouthfeel of the wine is a pleasant surprise and gives more weight than you might expect. Bright, fresh, balanced acidity makes it a great food wine that's delicious and approachable.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Quite a full bodied and fresh wine, it can match with simple grills of steak or lamb, but it also loves earthy and rich casseroles. A really good match with a mushroom risotto, but it has enough tannins and plushness to handle Roast Turkey and cranberry sauce.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Drink now or over the next 3-5 years. I would recommend drinking over the next 12 months. The freshness and vitality of the wine is great right now. Decant for 10-15 minutes.



2016 DREISSIGACKER ORGANIC TROKEN RIESLING *Rheinhessen, Germany*

Jochen Dreissigacker is a young vigneron creating wines from some of the most exciting vineyard sites of Rheinhessen. He took over the reins at his family estate in 2005 and began the work of converting to Biodynamic viticulture.

Jochen is trying to enhance the vitality of his soils using natural methods, limiting yields, harvesting by hand and vinifying with native yeasts.

Rheinhessen is a unique expression of German viticulture. Normally when one thinks of the greatest vineyard sites for Riesling, you envision the breathtaking slopes of the Mosel or the hand-worked terraces of the Rheingau. In the best villages of Rheinhessen, the vines grow on gentle slopes, overlying a bedrock of active limestone—reminiscent of the great terroirs of Burgundy. These sites produce wines of great depth and concentration with scintillating tension between ripe fruit, acidity and mineral structure.

It was this tension and energy that attracted Dan and I to this wine. This wine is partly Estate fruit, along with some purchased (organic) fruit from friends and neighbours. (Which is why it is called Organic and not

Biodynamic.) It is fermented in 100% stainless steel and has a clear, pale lemon colour. Spicy and fresh, with a lovely minerality on the nose. Stone fruits like nectarine and peach come through on the palate, with well integrated acidity and it finishes with mouth-watering grapefruit flavours.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Modern Australian Cuisine with an Asian Slant, most seafood – Thai and Vietnamese dishes, or simply by itself.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Short term cellaring would be fine (2-3 years) but my recommendation is to drink over the next 6 months.



2016 FELIX CALLEJO FLORES DE CALLEJO *Ribera del Duero, Spain*

The Callejo family craft some of the finest and brightest Tempranillo's in the 'modern Spanish' movement. The wines are plump, silky textured and full of fruit. The viticulture is organic and everything is done by hand, according to the minimal intervention model; manual harvesting, natural yeast fermentation, plus no fining or filtering.

The vineyards are situated in the northern part of the Ribera del Duero appellation, in the highest part of the Duero valley (850 to 930 metres above sea level). The high altitude brings about sharp contrasts of temperature between day and night-time, with swings of over 15°C, which enhance grape ripening during the day, while the low night temperatures preserve good acidity. This is the Diurnal temperature range which is so vital to great grape growing.

The fruit for this wine is hand harvested from organically tended old bush Tempranillo vines (40+ years) or Tinta Fina in the local dialect. Some very fastidious winemaking, including hand sorting of bunches and minimal oak maturation (6 months French Oak) has ensured the quality of the fruit shines through.

In style, it remains unashamedly modern, with a silky core of juicy blackberry and blueberry fruit, some wood spice, focussed tannins and a streak of high-country vibrancy. This is the energy and tension I find so appealing from wines of this region.

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 20 minutes before serving. This wine is designed for mid-term cellaring, 3-5 years, but I will be drinking this wine over the next 12 months and enjoy the freshness and plushness.



ABOUT THE SOMMELIER

Dan Sharp is the head sommelier at Sixpenny in Stanmore, one of Sydney's leading restaurants with "Two Hats" to their name. He is in charge of an impressive wine list focusing on Australia and France.

Prior to working at Sixpenny, he was the Head Sommelier at EST., as well as working a vintage at Pegasus Bay winery in NZ, to get his hands dirty so to speak. He also worked at one of NZ's leading restaurants, Logan Brown in Wellington

Dan continues to travel the world honing his craft and if not in Sixpenny, can be found in a winery or vineyard somewhere in the world.

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However this will be explained on the label with the reference to "RS" or residual Sugar. What you find with these styles is that the acidity of the wine is very high and the Residual sugar is needed to balance the palate.)

The red wines of Piedmont in Italy never fail to impress. This is the home of the famous Nebbiolo based wines of Barolo and Barbaresco. However Piedmont is more than just Nebbiolo, with great wines also being made from the local Barbera grape variety, grown around the town of D'Alba. Dan has chosen the **2015 Mauro Molino Barbera D'Alba**.

The Barbera d'Alba region is incredibly picturesque, with lovely rolling hills and vineyards throughout the entire countryside, centred around the town of Alba, which is Piedmont's unofficial wine capital. It overlaps the Barolo and Barbaresco zones and most of the Barbera's from this zone are by winemakers who also produce Barolo or Barbaresco wines. The Barberas are typically deeply coloured and robust with ripe plum and cherry flavours. The overwhelming feature of Barberas however are the bright fruit flavours and bracing acidity. Aging in wood can sometimes obscure and overpower these flavours, which is why this wine has not seen any oak maturation. As more and more people look for brighter wine styles, this comes up trumps. But don't think this wine is in any way wimpy. It still packs plenty of flavour and shows why Piedmont is one of the premier wine regions of the world.

Spanish wines are not new to our sommeliers or our customers. It is no surprise really, for the best quality and best value wines are still coming out of this country. They lack the pedigree and history of French wines, so thankfully, the Chinese wine buyers have not discovered these wines yet and so the prices are still very reasonable. The wine Dan has chosen is the **2016 Felix Callejo Flores De Callejo from the Ribera del Duero**. This region is an old favourite of ours and the wine is made from the Tempranillo grape variety, or Tinto Fina as it is known in this part of Spain.

Over the past 30 years, Ribera del Duero has challenged Rioja for the crown of Spain's greatest wine region, although in past years, Priorat has been knocking on the door. Ribera Del Duero used to be a backwater of the wine world, but all that changed in the late 1980's when the US discovered the wines and they have never looked back. It is still an unlikely looking wine region, located in a bleak landscape of flat-topped rocky heights, in the central north of Spain. There are no picturesque wine villages, rather just a few, widespread and generally charmless towns which still look desperately poor and basic. However the wines are anything but. They tend to be rich and plush, with a velvety touch, and very food-friendly. There is a tension and a sense of energy when you drink these wines which I always enjoy.

So there you have the four wines from our latest Sommelier Selection.

Enjoy!

Matt, The Bullionaire



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan