

the bullionaire

BULLION 180

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A Taste of Europe!

Kim Bickley is back on the "Bullion Spittoon" and she has decided to concentrate on European wines for this selection, specifically Spain, Italy and France. It has been a while since we have featured two Italian wines, so I thought I would spend a little time on Italy for this newsletter.

Depending on the report you read, Italy is either the largest producer of wine in the world, or second to France. It does seem to change from year to year. Yet, for a lot of Australians, Italian wines bring back vague memories of dodgy Chianti in straw bottles, or cheap Pinot Grigio. Italy, however, offers so much more, as you will know if you have been lucky enough to spend any time in the country driving around the many different wine regions; but it can be very confusing.

In Australia, this confusion stems back to a person you may not be familiar with; James Busby (*James Busby was the Godfather of the Australian Wine industry, who first brought a large selection of vine cuttings into our country in the early 1800's. So creating the Australian wine industry.*) But instead of sourcing some grapes from Italy, Busby went to France for the varieties he would bring to Australia. Due to our restrictive customs and quarantine practices, very little new grape materials were subsequently brought into the country and it is only in the past 25 years that Australia has diversified and planted what we call "Alternative varieties"

So instead of Sangiovese, Nebbiolo, Montepulciano and Barbera, Australians got used to drinking Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Grenache. But despite our lack of knowledge and understanding, an amazing diversity of wines are produced up and down "the boot of Italy", including the two major islands of Sicily and Sardinia. In fact there are 20 major regions, producing wines from over 350 different grape varieties. And this is where the confusion really begins and never really finishes. The vast majority of this wine is produced under the *Vino Da Tavola* - or table wine category, however it is in the three higher qualities of IGT / DOC and DOCG that the real interest begins. (On the back page is a brief summary of the four main classifications).

There are a number of world famous regions and varieties – Sangiovese & Tuscany, Nebbiolo & Piedmonte, but there are just as many high quality wines produced and consumed in their local region, which are seldom exported. In fact it is difficult to separate the local Italian wines with their cuisines, as they have developed side by side over the centuries. You often hear this, but for Italian wines it is important to match the right wine with the right food, and whilst the wines Kim has chosen are great to drink by themselves, it is when you sit down with a nice meal that they really shine.

First up we have a Pinot Bianco from Emilia Romagna. No, not Pinot Grigio; Pinot Bianco. This is a grape variety mainly grown in Alsace (where it is called Pinot Blanc) and Northern Italy. Where Italian Pinot Grigio can be light and



cheerful, Pinot Bianco is often more full bodied and sensual. Think toasty honeydew and melons on a full bodied palate.

Pinot Grigio is as ubiquitous as a Donald Trump tweet from and is grown on the plains and valley floors of Northern Italy, producing large quantities. Cheap and cheerful is the way for Grigio, but the bar is set much higher with Italian Pinot Bianco. Pinot Bianco needs very specific growing conditions to excel, including hillside vineyards, generally above 450 meters. Here the natural body and breadth of flavours combine with its raciness and freshness, resulting from the cool climate and high altitude. Kim has chosen a great example from the Bidente Valley of the larger Emilia Romagna Region of North Eastern Italy, the **2016 Poderi Dal Nespoli - Pinot Bianco**.

Next up is a wine made from a grape variety that causes even more confusion. I did tell you that Italy was hard to get your palate around. Montepulciano is the name of a grape variety, but it is also the name of a village in Southern Tuscany. Strangely no Montepulciano is grown in or around the town of Montepulciano; instead they grow Sangiovese, producing a DOCG wine called *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*. In fact it was the first wine and region to be granted DOCG status. But we don't want to talk about Sangiovese, we want to talk about Montepulciano. Kim has chosen the **2015 La Calcinara 'Il Cacciatore di Sogni**.

This winery is young by Italian standards, created in 1997 with an initial planting of just 4 hectares in the village of Candia, within the Marche region (Central East Coast of Italy). Candia is a small town of about 800 people, situated 200 m above sea level and 5 kms from the sea. Montepulciano is the 2nd most planted red grape in Italy (after Sangiovese) and has a reputation for low-priced "pizza-friendly" red wines. Fortunately, there are a number of producers in Italy who have chosen special sites, devoting the care and

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SOMMELIER SELECTED AND DELIVERED

THE WINES



2015 LA CALCINARA 'IL CACCIATORE DI SOGNI – MARCHE *Italy*

La Calcinarina wines began in 1997 in the Calcinarina district of Candia (Ancona) when a leading expert identified the site as great potential for growing Montepulciano grapes. So on the 20 hectare property, 4 hectares of the Montepulciano grapes were planted. In 2005 a new winery was built and it was around this time that the wines really came into their own. In the meantime, the vines were increased to a total of 9 hectares. They also have 4 hectares of olive groves, which is a very common trend in Italy, where different crops and activities are carried out on smallish estates.

La Calcinarina is a genuine hands on family business, the team comprises of brother and sister, Paolo and Eleanor, who under the guidance of their father are making some of the best wines of the region.

The vineyard is situated at 200 metres above sea level and the 2015 vintage is 100% Montepulciano, where in past vintages they have blended in a little Merlot. Everything is very hands on in the vineyard and winery, with very traditional winemaking practices. The wine spends 14 months in French Oak before a bottling

with minimal filtration. A very intense wine, which is so fresh and vibrant. There can be a tendency of Italian wines from lesser known regions to get carried away with the oak and power ratio, (In the pursuit of more, they end up with too much) but thankfully this wine is not one of those. A very attractive ruby red colour with violet aromas overflowing with fruity scents of cherries, plums and leather. A long lingering finish that has you reaching for a second glass and then a second bottle.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Excellent with pastas with meat sauce and medium cheese. Braised and stewed meats. Think of meat dishes that have a high fat content.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before serving, can be safely cellared for the next 5-7 years.



2016 PODERI DAL NESPOLI – RUBICONE DOGHERIA *Pinot Bianco Bidente Valley Emilia-Romagna Italy*

This winery was founded in 1929, remaining in the hands of two families over four generations. They have recently brought new partners into the group to significantly increase their vineyard and winery holdings, whilst enabling them to increase their production and take their wines to the world. They export to over 30 countries and own or manage over 150 hectares. Thankfully the quality of the wines has not suffered, in fact the quality has vastly improved in the past 5 years as they moved into their "eco friendly" very classy, new winery.

Kim and I loved this wine when we tried it, Kim thought it was one of the better Pinot Bianco's she has tried and definitely one of the best value. It is a slightly unusual blend of 90% Pinot Bianco with 10% Sauvignon Blanc.

This wine has lovely honey dew and melon aromas (Pear, green apple, subtle honey and tight minerality) coupled with a very complex and structured mid to full bodied palate. There is a lot going on in this wine and if you

like Chardonnay, you will love this wine, whilst strangely if you do not like Chardonnay, you will also love this wine. Dogheria takes its name from a small village in the Bidente Valley, home to the vineyards used to make this wine.

FOOD MATCHINGS

As a general rule, great as an aperitif or serve with seafood. To be more specific would be great with sashimi of tuna with stir fried wok vegetables. When in doubt stick to roasted and grilled fish and white meats. Will also be very nice at your local Asian BYO.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Serve Chilled. Can be safely cellared for the next 2-3 years, but I will be enjoying my wines over the next 3- 6 months. With already two years in the bottle, the wine is in the zone right now.



2014 S. DELAFONT MINERVOIS *France*

Syrah, Mourvedre and Grenache

Samuel Delafont calls himself an Artisan Negotiant. He began his wine life as a retailer and consultant, setting up a business in 2000 which assisted the winemakers in the Languedoc to market themselves to the international markets. After spending so much time with the winemakers and growers he realised he had the skills and contacts to create a wine brand, he just lacked the resources to purchase the vineyards and winery. Fast forward to 2010 and he found the resources for the winery, but realised he did not need the vineyards, rather he could source the fruit and wines from growers and other winemakers to create his own blends. He has become the master blender of the area and his wines are always regarded as the best value and best quality from the Languedoc.

This wine is sourced from a number of organic and biodynamic producers around the village of Minervois, a region situated in the south of the Languedoc. For a long time Minervois has been associated with cheap and cheerful, however a higher percentage of Syrah and Grenache in the blends, with more defined site selection (older / higher vineyards) and reduced yields have had a profound effect. S. Delafont ticks all these boxes. The 80%

Syrah in the blend adds spice and pepper, but you also have the intriguing notes of liquorice, aniseed and thyme as well as blackberry and plum. A full bodied wine that will bring a joy to any occasion. Only 40% of the blend has seen Oak barrel treatment, the rest has been aged in their unique 300 litre stainless steel barrels. They use these barrels to retain the “fruitiness” and freshness of the wines.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Roasted red meats would be ideal, especially lamb of any type, roast or rack will do the trick. The elegance and sophistication of the wine also makes it perfect for non-spicy Asian foods, or even Korean BBQ. A lot of Asian restaurants are BYO and this would be the perfect choice.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant the wine for 25 minutes before serving. The wine can be safely cellared for another 6-8 years.



2015 BODEGAS DEL ABAD – MENCIA *Bierzo Spain*

Mencia the grape variety and Bierzo the region are very on trend with sommeliers and wine lovers alike. As the world gets smaller, it has never been easy to discover the next big thing and people are always on the lookout for any new exciting wine and region. Over the past 20 years this isolated region in the North West of Spain has been scoring a lot of goals. Bierzo boasts a long winemaking history, but for most of the 20th century it was neglected and largely left alone. Fast forward to the 21st century and young winemakers have flocked to the area taking advantage of old hillside vineyards planted to the Mencia grape, making fresh, energetic and intriguing wines.

Bodegas Del Abad manages five hectares, mainly Mencia, along with the white grape variety Godello. The vineyards have an average age of 50 years and are situated on hill side slopes (650 metres), which have a high proportion of quartz and slate in their soils.

The modern Mencia wines are deliciously complex with prominent flavours of dark fruits and flowery herbs. This is a great example of this style; medium

to full bodied, which lovers of rich Burgundy’s and Pinots will really enjoy. This wine has cherry overtones with an ever so slightly bitterness (Sour Cherries), adding to the overall freshness and vitality of the wine, combined with a subtle crushed gravel or granite-like minerality in the texture. I know this sounds a little fanciful but you cannot help but think of the quartz and slate soils where the grapes are grown. You also cannot help but notice the acidity of the wine, so fresh and vibrant. I can see why these wines have become so popular.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Red meats and non-spicy Asian dishes would be a great match. Peking duck would be a match made in heaven. The earthy tones also make it great with Smoked meats and other BBQ’d dishes.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before serving. Can be safely cellared for 5-7 years.

ABOUT THE SOMMELIER



Kim Bickley is one of the top Sommeliers in the country, previously working at award winning restaurants Glass Brasserie and Black by Ezard. From there she used her qualifications as a wine educator, teaching WSET wine courses for Lion Beverages alongside being the brand ambassador for Bollinger Champagne and Henschke wines.

Most recently Kim has relocated to the picturesque Hunter Valley and is working for one of its top producers Thomas Wines.

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.

Some of her most favourite wines are Pinot Noir particularly from Morey-St-Denis, good Barolo and Hunter Valley Semillon.

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attention required for quality wine. The results are medium to full bodied wines with inky black appearances, showing dark fruits, enticing aromas and flavours, all balanced with natural acidity. They cry out for meals of substance, as Montepulciano will cut through the meatiest of meats (like beef ribs or slow cooked lamb). If you learn only one tip about Montepulciano, it is to match it with something with substance (fat).

We now head to Spain and France for the next selections. First up is a very on trend grape variety and region from the North West of Spain. The **2015 Bodegas Del Abad – Mencia** from the region of Bierzo.

Mencia ("Men-thee-ah") is a medium bodied red grape variety, producing wines with very floral, red fruit flavours. You might not have heard of this variety, but it is extremely popular, as sommeliers and drinkers alike, delight in finding old vine traditional varietals from even older regions that fell on hard times during the 20th century. Fast forward to the 21st century and these regions are now the shining lights of Spain and Europe. Young talented winemakers have moved in, taking advantage of the "cheap" ancient hillside vineyard sites, bringing much needed investment and passion to the area. They are producing very exciting wines which have generated plenty of buzz. Mencia and Bierzo tick all these boxes.

Mencia is grown in Bierzo, Valdeorras and Ribera Sacra in North Western Spain, as well as Dão in Portugal. Bierzo is a remote region which was largely unknown 25 years ago, yet it boasts a pre-Roman winemaking history. It was devastated by phylloxera in the early 1900's and then dominated in the mid to late 20th century with cheap and cheerful co-operatives. However it has now become a magnet for the bright young stars of Spain, rightfully gaining international recognition, right up there with Rioja, Ribera del Duero and Priorat.

It is in a small, remote, region, with most of the vineyards being small, rocky and hilly. The soil is littered with granite and slate, which always add a sense of energy, tension and minerality to the wines. Two grape varieties dominate, Godello for white and Mencia for Red. If you are a fan of Nebbiolo, or rich vibrant Pinot's from Central Otago then you will be a fan of Mencia. Expect medium to full bodied wines with exotic wildflower aromas and flavours, coupled with red fruits like strawberry, raspberry, cherry and black liquorice. YUM!

We now finish with a wine from an old favourite at Bullion Cellars. It is from the region of Minervois, which is located in the Southern part of France called the Languedoc, some 40kms from the Mediterranean coast. We love the wines from the Languedoc, for whilst it is home to a sea of cheap supermarket style wines, it is also home to some seriously good wines,

always offering great value. These are the wines which our Sommeliers just love. The secret is to choose winemakers who have vineyards located on the hill side slopes which have a bit of age on them.

Kim has chosen the **2014 S Delafont Minervois**. The average age of the vines is 30 years, grown under bio dynamic principles, always a great sign, as the winemakers have to show a greater level of respect and dedication, normally translating into better wines. The wine is a blend of Syrah, Mourvedre and Grenache, but predominately Syrah (80%). What is a little different at Delafont is that they do not own any vineyards, rather they source wines and fruit from selected growers in the various regions around the Languedoc. They only work with organic and bio-dynamic producers and their Minervois blend is always a standout.

So there you have four wines which will bring a smile to your face and a party to your palate. THANKS KIM!

Matt, The Bullionaire

FOUR ITALIAN QUALITY CLASSIFICATIONS

Vino Da Tavola (VdT)

This designates wines that reside firmly on the "low end" of the totem pole. The only criteria is that they must be produced somewhere in Italy.

Indicazione di Geografica Tipica (IGT)

These table wines are often lower entry wines grown in specific geographical growing regions. However, there are exceptions -- some of Italy's best wines (aka the "Super Tuscans") fall under this category just to avoid the more stringent regulations associated with DOC or DOCG, allowing for more experimentation.

Denominazione di Origine Controllata (DOC)

Wines in the DOC category must be made in specified, government defined zones. There are currently over 300 DOC wines in Italy, all adhering to specific vineyard and vinification requirements.

Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita (DOCG)

The highest quality for Italian Wines. It is comprised of a relatively limited number of wines. DOCG wines must meet all of the requirements of the DOC wine, with more stringent vineyard and vinification requirements.