



the bullionaire

BULLION 21A

Welcome to 2021 Bullion Style

Well it looks like COVID will be with us for another year, but I sense we are heading into a "New Normal" with life moving on as we deal with vaccines and random, sudden lock downs. One thing we can look forward to however, is good wine. One of life's little luxuries! So, as we head into the first of our Sommelier Selections for 2021, we can all look back and give a big "up yours" to 2020. Not one of the better years, but I guess it could have been worse, if a certain "orange" looking man had won his second term.

We were lucky to be offered a great aged wine from Spain in this selection and this got me thinking about aged wines in general, why we cellar wine and to be honest with you, what all the fuss is about? You see, one of the first questions we get asked at Bullion, is how long you can cellar a wine for. A little strange, for in the grand scheme of things, no one is really cellaring wine anymore. Did you know, that the average length of time, from when a bottle is purchased, to when it is opened in Australia is less than 3 hours. But whilst no one is drinking wine that is 10 years old, let alone 20 years old, there is still a romantic notion of keeping a wine in a cellar and bringing it out in it's prime. Plus, there is an assumption that a wine cannot be great unless it can be cellared for 30 plus years. But if no one is cellaring wines for 30 years, does this really matter anymore? No one really has the answers to these questions, just many opinions.

Here is mine! I for one love the romanticism of Chateaus and underground cellars, with old bottles covered in cobwebs and dust. But whenever I taste or drink a wine older than 15-20 years, I feel like I have missed the boat somehow. Sure, the wines are smooth, soft and elegant, but they are lacking the primary fruit and the energy I look for in the very best wines. This tension between fruit, tannins and oak gives the wine the structure and complexity I look for in a top wine. But whenever I drink older wines, all I get is mellow. Sure, it is a nice mellow, but to me I wish I had drunk the wine 5-10 years earlier. I think this romanticism harks back to the 20th century of English gentlemen in tweed jackets drinking old Bordeaux in the cellars of even older chateaus, when wine needed 20 years before it could be drunk. Very romantic and very desirable, but to 99.9% of the population, totally unachievable.

Today, modern wines are designed to be drunk on release, with only a very few wines created to last longer than 10 years. Even the First Growth Bordeaux's and Grange can be drunk and enjoyed when released.



Rioja vineyard, Tempranillo Grapes

Now don't get me wrong, I am all for aged wines and putting a wine down for a few years, but just not too long. I have a little rule for my wines and cellar. I will not keep a wine older than 10 years. To me this is the Goldilocks rule. Not too young and not too old, it is just right.

Now, people whose palate and knowledge I really respect, think I am crazy when I tell them this, but I want this tension, I want this primary fruit. Or is this just because I am not drinking enough older wines? A good question! So, if you do have some great wines tucked away, think about drinking them sooner rather than later. You will never get angry if you drink a wine too early, but you will kick yourself if you wait too long. But remember, in wine it is only your opinion that matters. So, disregard these past few paragraphs and continue to do whatever makes you happy. If you love old wines and are lucky enough to have some old wines in your cellar, enjoy. But if you have a few bottles of each, try drinking some at 10 years. I think they will be ready.

Now what wine has brought on these thoughts of aged wine. It is a wine from one of my favourite regions and countries. The **2012 Lan Reserva from Rioja in Spain**. This wine would normally fit outside the pricing guidelines we work with at Bullion, but we have a long relationship with the importer and they offered us this last parcel of wine at a great price. This is the last stocks of this vintage in the country and it is bloody good.

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the wines



2012 LAN RESERVA TEMPRANILLO / MAZUELO *Rioja, Spain*

Bodegas Lan is one of the younger wineries of Rioja, established in 1972. Their name pays homage to the three provinces where Rioja's grapes grow: Logroño (now La Rioja), Alavá, and Navarra. What was a little uncommon back in 1972 was how the winery looked to the environment when they were formed. This is standard now, but it was critical in the foundation DNA of the winery. They have always stayed away from chemical herbicides, pesticides, or fertilizers in the vineyards, maintaining the health and vitality of the soils and the people who live and work there. Seems straightforward now, but back in 1972 this was revolutionary.

Tempranillo is the king of Rioja and makes up 92 % of this wine with the balance being Mazuelo, the local name for Carginan. It makes sense that I liked this wine, for I just love Carignan. It is a variety you seldom see by itself, but when you look at the great red wine blends of Europe, you will find Carignan in the mix. Think of the great wines from the Cote Du Rhone and closer to Spain the great wines from Priorat. The fruit was sourced from several vineyards with an average age of more than 25 years. It then spent 18 months in their unique French and American oak

Barrels. (The staves or sides being US oak and the tops being French), and then a further 21 months in bottle.

The wine reveals a lovely bouquet of dried blueberry, raisin, black pepper, cigar box and oak. Sensual tannins, with well-integrated acidity finish off the palate. It is medium bodied and utterly drinkable. You don't sense this wine is nearly 10 years old, for it is still dynamic and engaging. But you do get a lovely sense of time when you drink this wine, for it certainly has a very mellow and well-rounded palate that is all about velvety smooth lushness.

FOOD MATCHINGS

The obvious food pairing with Tempranillo 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 minutes before drinking. Whilst you could cellar this wine for another 2-3 years. Why wait. The winery has done the job for you. Enjoy over the next few months.



2019 KIENTZLER PINOT BLANC *Alsace, France*

The Kientzler domaine is a small family-run estate consisting of just 14 hectares of vines, of which 3.7 hectares are classified Grand Cru. The total output is a tiny 6000 cases, so as you can imagine their focus is very much on quality. These Grand Cru sites have been identified over the past 300 years as the region's best. They produce some truly amazing wines, in fact one of the best wines I have ever tried is a Riesling from this estate- The 2008 Riesling Grand cru "Geisberg". It was expensive, but worth every cent. These wines make up a tiny percentage of the 6000-case production, so it is with the village wines of Pinot Blanc and Riesling that the estate is judged on year after year.

For the past 30 years this Domaine's passion has been for dry and gastronomic wines. This Pinot Blanc is a great example. Made primarily from the Auxerrois grape variety, the grapes were hand harvested from several vineyards around the village of Ribeauville. After pressing, fermentation took place in temperature-controlled vats (at 18 to 24°C). The wine was racked just once, before natural clarification during the course of the winter. The wine is lightly filtered just before bottling.

An unoaked style of wine which is all about mineral freshness and floral aromas. The full-bodied nature of the wine is brought together with this lovely nuttiness and cracking acidity. You also get a touch of apple and pear aromas with a juicy and refreshing palate. I can see why this winery is regarded as one of the region's top producers.

FOOD MATCHINGS

You don't want to over chill this wine. Enjoy it at 8°C with all manner of seafood (poached, grilled, smoked, marinated or in creamy sauces), or at the start of a meal as an aperitif where it would be perfect with goat or sheep cheese. It is also just amazing with most spicy Asian dishes.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Drinking well over the next 3-5 years.



2019 KERRI GREENS FOOTHILLS PINOT NOIR *Mornington Peninsula, VIC*

The Kerri Greens winery was established in 2013 when two friends and winemakers - Tom McCarthy and Lucas Blanck decided to invest in a neglected vineyard, planted in 1982, consisting of 2 acres of Chardonnay on what became known as the Hickson Vineyard. The Kerri Greens philosophy has become entrenched in the vineyard ever since, as they have gone on to purchase 2 more sites across the Mornington Peninsula using sustainable and organic principles. As you would imagine, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are their major focus.

This wine is sourced from the Silverwood Vineyard planted in 1998 and purchased by Kerri Greens in 2016. Planted on a gentle but highly exposed north slope in Balnarring, the eastern most foothills of the Mornington Peninsula, hence the name. They are in the process of converting all the vines to their preferred arch pruning method plus the vineyard is being weaned from irrigation and systemic fungicides and herbicides.

Viticulture and winemaking are very hands on and low fi. The fruit was handpicked and fully destemmed, transferred directly to bins by gravity with no crushing. The focus is on keeping the berries as whole as possible.

There was no Sulphur or yeast added and the must was left undisturbed until fermentation naturally began 5 days later. Plunging of this must took place daily before the wine was transferred to oak barrels (25% new) for 12 months.

The wine is brimming with plush ripe fruit, think cherries, strawberries, spice and some dried herbs. The oak is subtle but frames the wine, combined with fine tannins and a silky elegant finish. The wine offers great complexity and texture.

FOOD MATCHINGS

The combination of great acidity, silky tannins and subtle flavours is 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, games birds, casseroles and of 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.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before serving. The wine can be safely cellared for another 3-5 years.

2018 PAUL OSICKA SHIRAZ *Heathcote, VIC*



Established in 1955 by former Czech vigneron Paul Osicka, this is Heathcote's oldest producer; 2021 marking the 66th anniversary of the planting of the vineyard. Today, his grandson Simon tends the 10 hectares of vineyard producing a rich, highly drinkable Shiraz. Simon has spent considerable time in the best wineries and regions around the world and it is no great surprise that the wine quality from this producer has leapt ahead over the past decade. The fruit for the wine is grown on different soil types on the property and was picked and fermented separately in small, open top fermenting vessels. After an extended time on skins the wine was pressed and then matured in French Oak for 14 months, including 20% new oak.

Heathcote is a smallish region in Victoria and it is all about Shiraz. The Osicka Vineyard has been there since the beginning and this will certainly be a winery to watch over the next few years if the quality of this wine is anything to go by. It has a dense inky black core with a deep dark purple hue.

There are these lovely aromatics of freshly crushed blackberry, dark plum and liquorice tinged by slight floral tinges of violets. But it is on the palate where the wine really shines. Rich, velvety and juicy. Red berries dominate, with a touch of liquorice and a touch of elegant oak. Silky smooth with a powerful yet elegant finish. This is a great combination in a wine and I challenge you to open only one bottle at a time.

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. Also great with hard cheeses, or quite frankly just by itself.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant the wine for 20-30 minutes before serving. This wine can safely be cellared for another 5-8 years.

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Rioja is Spain's unofficial capital of wine and is a region where wine and history have long been intertwined. Situated in northern Spain where the cool, damp Atlantic climate of the north meets the hot, arid Mediterranean climate of the south, Rioja's rolling hills are defined by ideal viticultural conditions. Although many exceptional white wines are produced in Rioja, the region is best known and loved for its red wines made from the Tempranillo grape.

A common complaint of Rioja from 10-15 years ago, was that the wines were dull and over oaked, with any semblance of vitality and complexity drowned out by too much vanilla scented oak. This over oaking was a direct result of Rioja's quality rating, which is determined by how long the wine spends in oak. So, we have Joven (Young - less than 12 months) Crianza (2 Years) Reserva (Over 3 years) Gran Reserva (Over 5 years). Regardless of the quality of the wine, if it spends 5 years in Oak, it can be called a Gran Reserva and you will be charged a premium. As a result, Rioja used to be awash with over oaked and simple wines that were outrageously expensive. Thankfully times have changed. This Lan Reserva is a great example and with almost 9 years under its belt, it is in the zone of drinking right now. All the cellaring has been done, you just need to open and enjoy.

Alsace has always had a soft spot in my heart. I visited the region several years back and it is just beautiful. Medieval villages dotting the landscape, with cobble stone streets, thatched roofs and vineyards rolling down the hills to the back doors of the houses. The wines are sensational, led by their crisp aromatic white wines. Think Riesling, Pinot Gris and Pinot Blanc. It is the **2019 Kientzler Pinot Blanc** that has been chosen for this selection.

The Kientzler Vineyard has been handed down from father to son for over five generations, sustaining their passion for outstanding dry and gastronomic wines. Grown with a great respect of land and environment, they are a small producer with only 14 hectares of vineyards, with nearly half classified as Grand Crus. These are wines just crying out for food, and if you are thinking of matching a wine with Asian food, then look no further. The wines labelled as Pinot Blanc in Alsace are a bit of an oddity, in that they can be a blend of number of varieties. In most cases they are a blend of Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois. Auxerrois forms the majority of the blend for this wine, providing a more full-bodied style. But it has cracking acidity and these lovely green apple, nutty overtones that make it a joy to drink.

We now move onto 2 Australian Wines. One you will be quite familiar with, as we selected a Chardonnay from this supplier in the last pack, but this time we have chosen a Pinot Noir. The other red was new to me, which surprised me as I thought I knew most of the old wineries in Australia, a Shiraz from Heathcote in Victoria.

Pinot Noir is very trendy and Australia is making some sensational wines. The **2019 Kerri Greens Foothills Pinot Noir from Mornington Peninsula** is a great example. Kerri Greens began in 2013 when winemaker Tom McCarthy and Viticulturist Lucas Blanck decided to take on the restoration of an old vineyard and a new business was formed. I have since found out that Lucas hails from an Alsace winemaking family. Not sure if it makes this Pinot any better, but it sure does show that winemaking is in his blood. The vineyard that started this project was the Hickson vineyard, planted in 1982 and they have since gone on to purchase two more vineyards and the Kerri Greens project has never looked back. They are a small producer and obviously their focus is on what they grow in the vineyards with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir at the forefront.

They are also very sustainable, like most wineries these days and have gone down the organic route with very little additions in either the vineyard or the winery. This Foothills Pinot Noir is sourced from a vineyard they purchased in 2016 but planted in 1998. It supplies both Chardonnay and Pinot, and is at the higher elevation of Mornington, the foothills so to speak, and has quite poor soil, forcing the vines to dig deep for its nutrients. A great indicator of good quality fruit if the vineyard is managed properly. This wine has plenty of the cherry and strawberries you expect from Pinot, but it has this added level of complexity and "Forest floor" characters that I love in this style of wine.

The last red is from a region I have admired for a while, but from a producer I was not aware of. Heathcote in Central Victoria is all about Shiraz, but they make a more medium bodied, elegant style than say the Barossa or Mc Laren vale. It is more velvety, featuring dark cherry, plums with sweetly spicy fruit. The wine chosen is the **2018 Paul Osicka Heathcote Shiraz**. Paul Osicka came to the region in 1955 and now has the longest "established" vineyard and winery in the region. This came as a surprise to me, as I was not aware of this winery before. To be honest I think they kind of lost their way in the 1980's and 1990's relying on contract fruit sales, bulk wine sales and limited cellar door sales. It was not until the grandson, Simon joined the business full time in 2010 that things started to turn around. Simon has a first-class honours degree in Oenology and has held various winemaking and management positions in the Australian Wine Industry, most recently as the Senior Red Winemaker for Hardy's Wines, then previously at Leasingham in the Clare Valley and Houghton in Western Australia. Simon has also worked vintages in Germany, Italy, France and Canada. This included harvest at Domaine J.L. Chave in Hermitage in 2010, considered to be one of the finest producers of Syrah (Shiraz) in France.

Heathcote can get bloody hot during vintage and the winemakers need to work in the vineyard to control the ripeness and ensure the sugar levels do not get too high, taking out the all important natural acidity in the grapes. Simon seems to be able to master this better than most. I loved this wine when I tasted it. It had all the velvety goodness I enjoy, but it still has power and elegance. A rare combination to achieve. This is not a full bodied over the top Aussie Shiraz, dare I say it is maybe a little more European in style, but it is still distinctly Australian and a great example of why Shiraz is our signature grape variety.

So, as we head full steam into 2021, take a little time to enjoy these wines with your friends and family. Life is too short to only be thinking about social distancing and vaccines.

Matt the Bullionaire



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan, The Bullion Cellars Team