



# the bullionaire

BULLION 210

## Fine Wines for the Festive Season

### It's Sauvignon but not as you know it!

I have been drinking a lot of Sauvignon Blanc lately. Not the Marlborough style, which is a wine I don't particularly enjoy, rather it is the style from the Loire Valley in France. The Loire Valley is a large diversified wine region in Central France offering a wide variety of wines, including red, white, sparkling and sweet. There is something for everyone. We had a Chenin Blanc from this region in one of our earlier packs this year, but probably the most famous white wine from this region is Sauvignon Blanc from the regions of Sancerre and Pouilly Fume. These wines tend to be a little expensive – think \$60 plus, but well worth the effort to track down. They offer a level of minerality that is exceptional, and the better ones are generally aged in older oak for another level of complexity and structure. There are however other examples of Sauvignon Blanc from some of the larger sub regions and it is these wines that I have been enjoying, with their dry, full bodied styles offering wines with lots of minerality and elegance. They are a class above the wines from Marlborough, but maybe I am still being a bit biased. The wine we have selected is from a producer and sub region of the Loire Valley more closely aligned with Chenin Blanc. **The 2019 Francois Chidane Sauvignon Touraine Loire Valley.** Francois Chidane is one of France's most exciting white winemakers. His wines are terrific and the winemaking is impeccable. A combination of great vineyards, managed biodynamically, with ultra-low yields and hands-off winemaking. The amazing thing is that the wines are still so affordable. To give you an idea of his standing, when the son of one of the most famous winemakers in the Loire Valley, Didier Dagueneau wanted to gain some experience as a younger man, he went to Francois Chidane to learn his trade. I have been lucky enough to try a few wines from Didier Dagueneau, who sadly passed away a few years back in a small plane accident and this is a great acknowledgement of the respect shown to Francois Chidane.

If you are expecting the gooseberry and excessively fruit forward nature of Sauvignon blanc, then you will be disappointed, but if you want to experience a great wine full of complexity, flavour and length then you will love this wine, hopefully as much as I do.



*Loire Valley Vineyard, France*

I have said this before, but it won't be long before we put a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc in one of our packs, for I know a lot of NZ winemakers are experimenting with some smaller batches of wines made in this "Loire" style. To be honest, this is to appeal more to themselves than their current customers, but wine styles will always continue to evolve and change. Just look at the Australian Chardonnay of today, versus what was produced in the 1980's and 1990's.

Next up we have two Australian Red's, a Pinot Noir from the Mornington Peninsula and a Cabernet Sauvignon from the Finniss River near McLaren Vale. Australian wines really are surging in quality at the moment. First up is **2017 Salomon Estate Finniss River Cabernet Sauvignon.** Cabernet has become somewhat of a second-class citizen in Australia as everybody seems to be clamouring for the latest cool climate Pinot or a trendy new import from Spain. (Just like the other wines in this selection- Yes, I know Bullion Cellars is so on trend). I kind of understand this lack of interest in Cabernet, as most of the great Cabernets from Australia start at \$50 and in some cases are closer to \$100. They are very bloody good, but very expensive and not something to drink on a regular basis. Which is a shame for Cabernet is a great style. Step forward this lovely wine with an unusual back story.

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# the wines

## 2019 BODEGAS EXOPTO BOZETO DE EXOPTO *Rioja, Spain*



Bozeto means 'sketch' or 'outline' and as the name implies, this is the winemaker's entry wine, but that is a disservice to this wine, or more accurate an indication of the high quality of all his wines. It's a delicious wine and takes in a pan-regional expression of Rioja's three principle grape varieties. Tempranillo represents most of the blend (50%) from a selection of mature vines in Álbalos (high county Rioja Alta), and there is also some Álbalos Graciano (10%), adding freshness and finesse. What is a little unusual is that Grenache / Garnacha represents 40% of the blend. This Garnacha hails from the sandy, river stone terroir of El Agudo, a 60-year-old plot at Alfaro on Monte Yerga (in Rioja Oriental).

The wine is fermented in a combination of concrete and steel tank, then aged for six months in 5,000-litre oak vats. These days, the winemaker also includes a measure of semi-carbonic maceration, which alongside the depth of the vintage makes for one of Bozeto's most engaging releases yet.

This level of grenache is a little unusual in Rioja and the winemaker really wants to express this character in the wine but does it in a subtler way than if it was a varietal bottling. But this is a seamless wine with all the components nicely integrated with each other. 2019 was a warmer Mediterranean vintage, and the wine is soft and approachable, juicy and fruit driven with creamy, full-bodied plum and berry characters. There is a lovely purity to this wine that is polished and elegant. The wine also shows excellent tannin and oak integration, unusual for a youngish Rioja.

### FOOD MATCHINGS

Grilled meats are a good match, but then so too are tomato-based dishes like lasagne, pasta and pizza. If you have a wood fired pizza oven at home, crank it up and get stuck into this wine.

### CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 10-15 minutes before serving - Can be cellared for the next 3-5 years.

## 2019 FRANCOIS CHIDANE SAUVIGNON TOURAINE *Loire Valley, France*



François Chidaine is revered for his pristine Chenin Blancs from Montlouis and Vouvray in the Loire Valley. However, for a fraction of the price of those wines, you can get this touch of Chidaine magic made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes grown in Chissay-en-Touraine and Saint-Julien-de-Chédon, less than 10km from Montlouis. The viticulture here is strictly organic and biodynamic and the fruit was naturally fermented with a high degree of solids before maturation on lees until bottling.

As always with the wines of Chidaine, you get terroir first and varietal second, in fact I challenge you to pick this wine in a blind tasting as a Sauvignon Blanc. The 2019 is a brilliant vintage; pure, delicious, layered with pulpy, melon type characters, with the fruit clearly picked fully ripe. The wine finishes with stone fruits and gentle spice rather than any of the stereotypical characters we often associate with the variety. It is very clear this wine is not from Marlborough NZ. A great wine with a depth of flavour and complexity you expect from wines significantly more expensive.

### FOOD MATCHINGS

Best to stick with Seafood, or simply as an aperitif. Goats Cheese is also a very well known match with the Sauvignon Blancs of the Loire.

### CELLARING POTENTIAL

Can be safely cellared for another 3-5 years.



## 2019 QUEALY MORNINGTON PENINSULA PINOT NOIR *VIC, Australia*

A winery created from Mornington Peninsula royalty. Kathleen Quealy and her husband founded the very successful T'Gallant wine in the 1990's, being the first winery to plant Pinot Gris in Australia. They were so successful they were purchased by the largest wine company in the land. They were always going to get back into the vineyard and soils of the Mornington and Quealy is that new winery. They are focusing on Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris and this wine is a blend from the lower lying Campbell & Christine vineyards to the late-ripening Musk Creek Vineyard. They are planted to different clones and with varying vine age, but what binds these sites is Quealy's viticulture, as the Quealy family manages every single vine.

The fruit was selected for ripeness and their gentle tannins, and this is the most generous of the Estate's Pinot Noirs.

Each portion of the batch was matured individually in a mixture of new and older barrels for 15 months before assembling and bottling. A big sweet, sexy Pinot with generous middle palate and excellent length. Aromas of cherries and plums are matched with silky tannins and a generous mouthfeel.

### **FOOD MATCHINGS**

Of course, the best match is duck, but not many people serve this at home. I always choose a Pinot when I am eating Chinese dishes as it is so versatile and does not overpower the flavours. Salmon is always a safe bet as well.

### **CELLARING POTENTIAL**

Can be cellared for the next 5-8 years.



## 2017 SALOMON ESTATE CABERNET SAUVIGNON *Finnis River, South Australia*

A fantastic example of a South Australian Cabernet from the masters of Gruner Veltliner in Austria. Through a love affair of Australia and Penfolds, this winemaking family, with over 220 years in Austria, purchased a block of land near McLaren Vale and planted a vineyard in 1995. Bert Salomon has become the ultimate flying winemaker, doing vintages in each hemisphere since 2002. Not a bad way to spend your time. The soils of this vineyard are typically gravel and sand over red and orange sandstone, with the vineyard falling gently away towards the northwest, providing ideal exposure and plenty of warmth to ripen the grapes.

Balanced by the cooling breezes which roll off the Southern Ocean in the late-afternoon, ensuring excellent acid retention. There is a richness to this wine which is so enjoyable. It is very deep red in colour, with expressive aromas of blueberry and blackcurrant, with hints of dark chocolate.

However, it is on the palate where this wine really shines, as it is just so drinkable. It finishes with lovely velvety tannins. Like most Cabernets, there is always another variety blended in to help fill out the middle palate, in this case 10% Merlot.

The wine is barrel aged for 18 months in 300-litre hogsheads (approx. 50% new French oak). A very classy, elegant, moorish glass of wine.

### **FOOD MATCHINGS**

Think red meats and protein. A great medium rare steak would be your best bet.

### **CELLARING POTENTIAL**

Decant for 20 minutes before drinking, this wine can be safely cellared for the next 6-8 years.

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Older members will recall the Austrian Winery Salomon Estates and their Australian outpost. Bert Salomon is the eighth generation of Salomon Undorf, one of Austria's greatest wineries. They make amazing Riesling and Gruner Veltliner at Krems on the River Danube, just an hour's drive outside Vienna. Bert Salomon's journey into wine began when his mother encouraged him to gain some experience outside the family, taking a job with a wine importer in New York. Here he discovered a love and joy of International wines and the contacts that would lead to a successful import/export business; still in operation today. It was through these contacts that he was the first person to bring Penfolds into Austria, beginning his love affair with South Australian Reds. Frequent trips to Australia led him to claim a piece of Australia for his own, planting a vineyard in 1995, not far from McLaren Vale. He is a frequent visitor to the vineyard during vintage, getting fully involved in the community, even so far as his children attending the local school. It has now progressed to another generation, with his 30-year-old son becoming his own flying winemaker, working vintages with other wineries in South Australia. So here we have a winemaking family with almost 230 years' experience in Austria and over 20 years in South Australia. Not a bad accomplishment; but only notable if the wines are good. And yes, they are petty bloody good. The 2017 vintage is a rich full-bodied style, with plenty of blackcurrant and cedar characters. However, it still maintains plenty of freshness and vitality.

Cool Climate Australian Pinot Noir is very on trend at the moment with plenty of great wines coming out of Tasmania, the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula. Winemakers and consumers have fallen in love with these lighter bodied styles of wine and whilst prices can be scary high there are still some great examples that are not only affordable but also excellent quality. We have chosen the **2019 Quealy Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir** for this selection. Quealy was a name I was aware of, but more so for the history of the owners and the winery they created and then sold back in the 1990's. Kathleen Quealy is regarded as the winemaking soul of the Mornington Peninsula, who along with her husband launched the T'Gallant Winery in early 1990 and were the first winery in Australia to plant Pinot Gris. They were so successful with their "boutique winery" that they were purchased by the largest winemaking company in Australia (Treasury Wine Estates – Owners of Penfolds / Wolf Blass etc). Of course, they were always going to get back into the vineyards and start another winery and it is not surprising they have focused on Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir with their new winery Quealy. They have several vineyards spread across the Peninsula and are producing exciting wines. On a side note I remember when T'Gallant Wines were all the rage. Unfortunately like a lot of wineries purchased by Treasury Wines Estates, think Rosemount, the wines and the brand get lost in their big machine and never reach the heights or the fame that made them a target in the first place - a great shame.

But at least we can still enjoy Kathleen's wines through Quealy. This is a wine that blends the wines from the different vineyards at their disposal, and they have created a wine with a broad nose and a soft, full palate. Think plenty of dark cherries and a touch of charry oak. Yum.

The last wine is from my favourite country Spain, the **2019 Bodegas Exopto Bozeto de Exopto Rioja, Spain**.

I love Spanish wine styles and, in most cases, they are still very affordable, unlike the French and Italian wines, which seem to dramatically increase each and every year. This wine from Exopto is a great Rioja made from Tempranillo and Grenache, the main red varieties of the country. Rioja is one of the oldest wine regions in Spain and fell out of favour a bit in the past 20 years as new trendy regions took some of the spot light. In my humble opinion, Rioja tended to focus too much on how long their wines were matured in American Oak, rather than the inherent quality. The Rioja of today however is a very happening place, as a new generation of winemakers have either moved in or taken over family estates with a focus on making the finest possible "Rioja" from their regional sub zones. Bodegas Bozeto is a small producer by Rioja standards, only 3000 odd cases of wines. But they tick a lot of boxes; outstanding aged vineyards in cool micro climates on rocky soils, low yields, a newish winery and a passionate winemaker/owner who clearly knows how to make great wine. He is in fact a Frenchman, who married a local girl and settled into Rioja very nicely. His wines are engaging and drinkable and represent excellent value in a world full of over priced wines.

So, there you have the 4 wines as we finish off 2021. Not a great year by any stretch but one that will be remembered for a lot of negative reasons. A "Lock Down" is something I hope to never experience again. I have however enjoyed a lot of wines over this year and want to thank you for your continued support. We love what we do and offer at Bullion Cellars so don't be afraid to spread the word, as a recommendation from you will go along way to convincing your friends and family to also gain access to some of these wines.

Enjoy the silly season and we will touch base again in 2022. Let's hope for the Roaring Twenties to really kick in.

**Matt the Bullionaire**



*Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan, The Bullion Cellars Team*