



the bullionaire

BULLION 24A

A GREAT MIX FOR THE NEW YEAR

2024 feels like it is going to be a great year. COVID is well and truly over, inflation seems to be under control and the economy is looking OK. That is unless you are living in the Middle East, or Central Europe. We really are quite lucky to be at the bottom of the world, living our lives largely untouched from their troubles. We just do not need another pandemic ruining everything again. On this point, I feel we are all going to look back in 5-10 years and wonder if the COVID quarantine restrictions were real, or whether it was all a collective dream. But back to more important things and the next Bullion Cellars Sommelier Selection.

For the first selection of the new year, we have decided to mix it up a little. As we are still getting some quite warm weather, we have decided to supply 2 white wines. When we started Bullion Cellars, it was always our intention to select 2 reds and 2 whites. However, I quickly discovered that most of our customers prefer to drink red wine, especially as the wines get a little more expensive. An interesting fact in Australia; when you get above the \$25 retail value, the ratio of reds to white is about 8 to 1. This has never surprised me, but it has always disappointed me a little. You see I love white wine as much as I love red and rose wines, and I have always found the white wines in our selections to be of the highest quality, offering very distinctive and interesting wines. You see for a wine to be above \$30 in Australia, it really needs to be quite good, otherwise the wineries / importers just won't bother to make them or bring them in.

So, let's start with the 2 white wines we have chosen. A Chardonnay from the cool climate of Orange in NSW, and a very lovely and enticing white wine from Piemonte in Italy from the Gavi region, famous for its white wines from the Cortese grape variety. Australian Chardonnay has become my go to wine at the moment; plus, it is my wife's favourite wine. So, I am always on the lookout for great Chardonnay from Australia. I have been told that I like to repeat myself, but I will say it again, the best wine coming out of Australia now is Chardonnay. It is rightly regarded around the world as a shining example of the variety and rivals anything from other countries and regions at a fraction of the price. You, however, have to be a bit selective on the region and you really do have to spend above \$25. Below this price you will get a wine that is dominated by tropical fruit and a sweet finish, nice enough but nothing special. It is when you get to \$30 and above that you are really starting to get something special.



Photo supplied by Jasia Allen – December 2023

The wine we have chosen is from a winery I had not heard of before, but from a region I am very familiar with. **The 2022 Renzaglia Chardonnay from the Orange region of NSW.** This winery has recently been added to one of the better wine wholesalers and importers we work with, so I suppose I should not be surprised by the quality of the wine. It really stood out in the blind tastings that we do, and when I took the wine back home to drink that night, I had to fight to get a glass as my wife simply loved it.

Upon investigation Renzaglia is a small family-owned winery based in a small town south of Bathurst, called O'Connell, very off the beaten track. They source their wines from this home vineyard, plus a small vineyard on Mount Panorama in Bathurst. I have not tried these wines, for the wine we tasted is sourced from the high altitude, cool climate vineyards of Orange. Orange has become a shining light of Chardonnay and Pinot in this country and a bit of a "Foodie" star in NSW. The restaurants and cellar doors are pretty amazing. This wine ticks a lot of boxes and when talking to the distributor has a lot of winemaking techniques synonymous with fine wines. (Barrel Fermentation 20% new oak, Partial Malo Lactic Fermentation, Lees stirring etc) All these things take time and money and a sign of great confidence in the vineyard and the wine by the Renzaglia family. Think plenty of stone fruits, with a touch of butterscotch. This is a serious Chardonnay that is lively, fresh and vibrant. I just need to make sure the next time we drink this wine, that I get a glass before my wife drinks it all.

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the wines



2021 CHATEAU DE MANISSY LIRAC ROUGE *France*

Chateau De Manissy is in the region of Lirac, Cote Du Rhone France, tracing its history back to the 17th Century. Fast forward to the early 20th Century and the estate was bequeathed to a religious order of monks. Then in 2003, the estate was purchased by Florian Andre who has taken the wines to new levels. The vineyards are worked organically and biodynamically throughout, producing elegant, flavoursome wines of character and class. The estate was awarded AB Organic certification in 2009.

Sourced from vineyards with sandy soils with a subsurface of pudding stones. These stones are a feature of the area and assist in ripening the vines as the heat from the sun is retained during the cool nights. Every little bit helps. It is blend of Grenache and Syrah. The fruit is hand harvested then fermented by natural yeasts for around 20 days. It is then aged in a combination of 2–3-year-old barrels and concrete tanks, with an aim to let the fruit flavours shine through in the initial stages of the wine's life. The winemaker does not want the oak to dominate early on.

This wine is quite intense, yet also elegant and smooth at the same time. You get lovely aromas of red fruit, intermingled with the very distinctive “Garrigue” aromas that are a feature of this area. Garrigue is a term for the wild hill side vegetation of the Mediterranean Coast that instead of describing a single aroma in wine, refers to a mix of lavender, juniper, thyme, rosemary and sage. Once you taste and smell this you cannot get it out of your head. A great example of the region and style.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Roasted Beef or steaks, Lamb cutlets.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant the wine for 30 minutes before drinking. Can be safely cellared for another 5-7 years.



2021 WINES OF MERRITT ROUGE (CABERNET SYRAH) *Margaret River, Australia*

Wines of Merritt is a relatively new winery in the Margaret River taking advantage of their contacts in the area to source small volumes of high-quality fruit from vineyards, some of which they have worked for before. Their claim is the make small batch, non-intervention wines from unusual varieties. This wine is a Cabernet Shiraz blend, which whilst I grant you is a little unusual in the Margaret River, was one of the classic wine styles of the 70's, 80's and 90's and still pretty popular now.

This is 50:50 blend with Syrah sourced from a vineyard in Rosbrook and Cabernet Sauvignon from Willyabrup. The wine is aged in older barrels to ensure the fruit shines through onto the palate. When we tasted this wine, what really impressed was the full palate and the drinkability of the wine. There was a freshness and lightness combined with the generous palate that made the wine really stand out. It has lovely cool climate, spicy peppery aromas, with bright plum, red cherry fruit and a stunning weight. Yum and Yum.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Can be drunk by itself – Try also with Tomato based pasta dishes.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant this wine for 30 minutes before drinking. Can be safely cellared for the next 5-7 years.



2022 RENZAGLIA CHARDONNAY *Orange NSW Australia*

Renzaglia is a small family-owned winery based in a small-town South of Bathurst, called O'Connell, very off the beaten track. They source their wines from this home vineyard, plus a small vineyard on Mount Panorama in Bathurst, as well as a number of vineyards from the close by region of Orange.

The fruit for this wine has been sourced from the See Saw Balmoral Vineyard in Orange. The family have thrown a lot of time consuming and expensive winemaking techniques into this wine, and the quality of the fruit really shines through. A wine of great quality and value. The settled juice was barrel fermented by wild yeasts in a mixture of 20% new and the remainder, older barrels. Post primary fermentation, each barrel was treated individually, most went through a full malo lactic fermentation (MLF), and one was stopped prior to completing MLF to retain some tension in the wine. MLF is carried out to convert the harsher malo acids in the wine, into the softer lactic acid, often giving the wine its butterscotch character. The wines were all held on full fermentation lees and stirring was also done barrel to barrel. Wines were taken out of barrel and blended to tank in February 2023 taking some fine lees along. The blended wine was then held in tank for a further 6 months prior to a light filtration and bottling in late September 2023. As I said, the full monty! But this is only important if the wine tastes good and it sure does.

Expect melons and orchard fruits on a full-bodied palate. What is nice is the touch of oak and butterscotch that comes through at the end of palate. This is a serious Chardonnay and a joy to drink.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Most Seafoods, creamy pastas or simply by itself.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Can be safely cellared for another 3-5 years.



2021 LA RAIA GAVI DOCG *Piedmonte, Italy*

The grapes for this delicious white wine are grown biodynamically without any herbicides or pesticides on the Ravi estates which is set in the heart of the Gavi's rolling hills. The Estate was purchased in 2003 by the Rossi Cairo family who have worked hard to restore biodiversity and nurture the local eco system. They have taken huge strides in improving the quality of the wines.

Gavi is a DOCG region in the northern Italian region of Piemonte and in my opinion the most traditional of the white wines from this region, and in most cases, also the best. The wine is produced from Cortese grapes grown on a vineyard at 400 metres above sea level on one of the estates gently undulating hillside locations. After hand picking, destemming and pressing, fermentation began with an indigenous yeast cultivated from the estate's own vineyards. The wine then remained in tank and on fine lees for 3 months, with stirring every 2-3 weeks as needed. This cultivated the mid palate of the wine and gave it the drinkability and character that separates it from the run of the mill.

Clean, clinging, and vibrant, it evokes the orchard in its aromas and flavours of fresh herbs and green apples, with compelling notes of minerality, lemon zest and sea salt.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Excellent by itself as it is just a joy to drink. It is the perfect match also for seafood, white meat and fresh young cheese.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Can be safely cellared for the next 3-5 years.

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The next white wine is from Piemonte in Italy, the **2021 La Raia Gavi Piemonte**. The red wines of Piemonte in Northern Italy rightly garner most of the attention from this part of the world. Think of the great Barolo's and Barbaresco's made from Nebbiolo as well as the other great reds from this large region. However, they also make some great white wines as well. You have the slightly fizzy, slightly sweet Moscato D'Asti, as well as sensational dry wines made from the Arneis grape variety and of late, Chardonnay's made in a very new world style. The white wine I think is the best from Piedmonte though, as well as the most traditional, is from the DOCG region of Gavi, using the Cortese grape variety. La Raia is a great example.

The Rossi Cairo family bought La Raia in 2003, with the aim of recovering and enhancing the original ecosystem, using the biodynamic principles. The estate extends over 180 hectares, including 48 of vineyards, 60 hectares of fields, with the remaining left as pastures consisting of chestnut, elderflower and acacia woodlands protecting numerous species of wild animals. As you can imagine it is quite picturesque, if the photos on the website are anything to go by. The DOCG wines of Gavi are all made from the local grape variety Cortese, which I don't believe is grown a lot in Australia. The La Raia wine opens with refreshing notes of citrus, peach and stoney minerality, with crisp acidity and a pure clean finish. It was the mouthfeel that really grabbed me when I tasted this wine. Full bodied, and full of flavour, but not flabby, with the minerality and acidity really taking hold.

We now move to the reds, a Shiraz Cabernet blend from the Margaret River and a Grenache based wine from one of our favourite regions, the village of Lirac in the Cote Du Rhone in France. The wines of the Margaret River rarely disappoint, and the **2021 Wines of Merritt Rouge (Syrah/ Cabernet)** was no exception. The region is best known for its high quality Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, but upon investigation Wines of Merritt like to look a little outside the box. They hang their hat on making small batch, low intervention wines from single vineyards, with the goal to create unusual and distinctive wines. If I am being honest a Shiraz Cabernet blend is not that unusual in Australia, but the quality of this wine really stood out in the tasting. That and its drinkability.

I also have to be honest for I am generally a little scared when winemakers claim non-intervention as the first things they talk about for their wines. All winemakers strive for minimal intervention, unless you are making Jacobs Creek or Yellow tail in their Million litre tanks, and my experience of 'non-intervention wine' tends to be rather dull and disappointing, hiding a few faults. Thankfully this wine is not like that. It is a blend of Syrah and Cabernet from separate vineyards within the Margaret River. Wild fermented in older oak, it is spicy elegant and full of flavour. A very, very drinkable wine of great quality.

The last wine is from the village of Lirac, in the Cote Du Rhone in France. The **2021 Chateau de Manissy Lirac Rouge**. Within the larger Cote Du Rhone there are a series of Villages which over the centuries and decades have earned AOC status and the right to place the name of the village on the label. Only vineyards from within this geographic area can place the name on the label. The most famous and most expensive of these is Chateauneuf Du Pape, with other names like Gigandas and Carriane. However, the village name that I always look out for is Lirac, firstly for its quality and secondly for its value for money. What is also cool, in recent years, they have taken to using an embossed bottle with the words Lirac, similar to the wines of Chateauneuf du Pape.

The area of Lirac is the most Southern of the AOC Villages in the Cote Du Rhone and is largely situated on the opposite side of the bank of the Rhone River to Chateauneuf du Pape, sharing similar soils of sand and pebbles, despite not having the abundance of the distinctive gallets or pudding stones that litter the soils of Chateauneuf. The summers are dry and hot with the warm mistral winds keeping away any humidity. Perfect grape ripening conditions. This wine blend of Grenache / Shyrah has the classic floral notes and aromatics you would expect from its more famous region, but at a fraction of the price. A great find and a great Wine.

So, there you have the first 4 wines of 2024. Enjoy.

Matt, the Bullionaire.



Stu Freeman and Matt Eagan, The Bullion Cellars Team