



the bullionaire

BULLION 24C

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

For members who have been with us for a while you would have noticed my not-so-subtle digs at Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc from across the ditch. For someone who used to sell Australian wine into the Export markets I hated the fact Sauvignon Blanc from NZ was our biggest selling wine in Australia. But the tide is starting to turn, as sales of Sauvignon Blanc are decreasing, and the sales of Aussie Chardonnay are increasing. We still have a long way to go, but for the first time Chardonnay was the most picked grape variety from the 2024 vintage. This is a roundabout introduction to our first wine, a Sauvignon Blanc from the spiritual home of this variety in Sancerre and the Loire Valley of France. We are probably not going to choose a Sauvignon Blanc from NZ for one of our selections, for they are certainly not hard to find in your local bottle shop. But a Sancerre for under \$50 is another story. For those not familiar with Sancerre, it is a sub region of the Loire Valley in Central France, centered around the town of Sancerre, which lies on an outcrop of the chalk soil structure that runs from England to France (the white cliffs of Dover, right through Champagne, Chablis and Sancerre.) A series of small valleys cut through the chalk, each with their own soils, microclimates, and terroirs. It is this unique soil profile that makes the wines of Sancerre so distinctive. And yes, mineral overtones are very prominent. On a side note - it is this Chalk soil around Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire that have the English Sparkling wines beginning to rival the great sparkling wines of Champagne.

But back to Sancerre, which is often compared to neighbouring Pouilly-Fume and also specializing in 100% Sauvignon Blanc wines, and while there are some differences, only experienced tasters can really distinguish these. Broadly speaking, Sancerre tends to have a fuller body with more pronounced aromas, while Pouilly-Fumé wines are more perfumed. However, both wines have naturally high acidity and the potential to exhibit minerally, flinty notes as well as citrus and spicy notes. Sancerre features aromas and flavours of stone fruit (apricot), white flowers and notes of freshly cut hay with a light herbaceous quality. You will also get honeydew melon, and of course these distinctive flinty, minerally characters.

These are some of the great white wines of the world and quite different to the Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs, which are fuller bodied and more powerful in their aromas and flavours. At Bullion we prefer the more delicate nature of the wines of Sancerre and the wine we have chosen is the **2022 Chateau La Rabotine Sancerre**. Alban Roblin and his wife took control of Château La Rabotine and its vineyards in 2010.



Sancerre wine region

What seems like a new wine venture, is a continuation of an older one. The Roblin's have cultivated this land in the northern Sury-en-Vaux sub-region of Sancerre since the 1920s. Alban is the grandson of celebrated vigneron, Georges Roblin, of the former Château de Maimbray. When Georges retired, Alban took over his family's vines, and he and his wife settled in at Château La Rabotine. The terrain of the domaine is a blanket of rocks and stones, exposed gentle hillsides, and old vines (well over 40 years). Perfect for the making of high-quality wines. Of interest is that Sancerre is not only white wine. There is also some red and Rose wine made from the Pinot Noir Grape variety. Whilst they do not reach the heights of the white wine, they are certainly interesting to taste if you get the opportunity.

We now move to the red wines with two coming from Australia, a great aged Margaret River Shiraz from the 2015 vintage and a cool climate Cabernet blend from Beechworth in Central Victoria, finishing with one of the premier wines of Tuscany in Italy and a Sangiovese based wine from the town of Montalcino. But first to the Margaret River Shiraz. The wine we have chosen is the **2015 Streicker Bridgeland Block Syrah Margaret River**. The first thing that stands out is its age. You do not see a lot of wines from 2015 still for sale. We were extremely lucky to grab the last cases from the wholesaler at a great price. As you will know, Margaret River is known for its Cabernets and Chardonnays, but they produce excellent Syrah, when grown in the right soil and microclimates. I was not familiar with the Streicker wines or winery, but upon investigation they have a rather good story to tell.

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the wines



2021 CIACCI PICCOLOMINI D'ARAGONA ROSSO DI MONTALCINO *Italy*

In an area known for ancient wine estates, Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona is one of the originals. Located in the southeast of the Montalcino region, the estate of Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona can trace its roots back to the 17th century. The Ciacci family owned the estate for over a hundred years until the death of Countess Elda Ciacci in 1985. As the Countess had no children, she left the property to her long standing and well-respected estate manager Giuseppe Bianchini. His hard work and dedication have been continued by his son and daughter, Paolo and Lucia, who have developed the property and wines to their current respected position.

The Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona estate is one of the finest in Montalcino. The entire estate, extends over 195 hectares of which 50 are planted to vineyards and a little less than 40 in olive groves. It has all the typical characteristics of the Tuscan countryside adorned with rolling hills, pastures and woods with unforgettable scenery and colours.

Ciacci Piccolomini produces beautifully finessed and elegant wines. This Rosso Montalcino is better than a lot of Brunello's. Expect to find notes of red berry fruit, enriched by slight floral and spicy hints. Generous and well-rounded on the palate with great structure and round tannins.

FOOD MATCHINGS

An excellent wine suited to all courses, particularly hearty vegetable based soups, most soft cheeses, and of course most red meats – roasted over grilled. Best paired with very structured dishes, also accompanied by truffles or mushrooms or particularly rich sauces.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 20 minutes before servicing, can be safely cellared for another 6-8 years.

2022 CHATEAU LA ROBOTINE ALBAN ROBLIN SANCERRE *France*

The vineyards owned by Alban Roblin are at a higher altitude than most in Sancerre (~280m) and the wind that funnels through the valley, acts like a hair dryer to the vines, minimizing problematic rot and disease. This remarkable setting allows Alban to farm organically without sacrificing the quality of his fruit. Conversion to full organic certification will be in 2025.

Alban sources his fruit from four different vineyards in his unique pocket of Sury-en-Vaux: Les Perrieres, Le Canard, La Robotine and Côte de Valliens. Year in and year out, the finest Sancerre's come from vineyards composed of two distinct kinds of soil: Terres Blanches (Kimmeridgian limestone clay) or Caillotes (Portlandian limestone). Alban's four vineyards are evenly split between the two.

The wine has a brilliant pale straw colour with a faint greenish tinge around the edges. Aromas of lime, green apple and delicate grassy notes emerge from the glass with some fresh asparagus and stony mineral elements also evident. Crunchy green apple and lime fruits are underscored by zippy acidity with some stony mineral nuances lingering through the dry finish. This wine is elegant, energetic, complex and offers a lot of minerality. A great combination.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Classic pairings for Sancerre are goat cheese, seafood (white fish), green vegetables, especially asparagus and most salads. Perfect to drink by itself as well.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

No need to decant. Simply open the bottle and enjoy.





2022 A RODDA CUVÉE DE CHAIS (CABERNET BLEND) *Beechworth, VIC*

“Cuvée de Chais” loosely translates as cellar blend and is Adrian Rodda’s interpretation of a traditional Bordeaux blend or ‘Claret.’ Adrian believes when it comes to Bordeaux varieties, the sum is greater than its parts. Cabernet Sauvignon provides the tannin, length and structural backbone, Merlot contributes ‘the fuzzy ball of fruit’ in the mid-palate, Cabernet Franc provides fragrant red fruits and savouriness. Petit Verdot adds perfume and acid line to the finish.

Cabernet Sauvignon was crushed and de-stemmed whereas the other four varieties incorporated more whole berries. During fermentation, the timing and combination of pump-overs, “rack and returns,” pigeage and plunging was to preserve aromatics and perfume, yet extract adequate tannins for structure and length, depending on the variety. Post-fermentation, the Cabernet Sauvignon was held on skins for 15 days longer than the other varieties. All wines were pressed to French oak barriques (36% new) for 15 months.

The 2022 Cuvée de Chais consists of Cabernet Sauvignon (65%), Merlot (19%), Cabernet Franc (8%) and Petit Verdot (8%). The wine was bottled without fining or filtration.

An array of red and purple fruits (think dark cherries and plums) with heightened aromas of violets and wild herbs. The supple fruit weight is seamlessly interwoven with fine, velvety tannins giving the wine great balance and finesse.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Medium Rare Steaks - Roast Beef, roasted Potatoes and Gravy.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant the wine for 25-30 minutes before drinking. Can be safely cellared for the next 6-8 years.



2015 STREICKER BRIDGELAND BLOCK SHIRAZ *Margaret River, WA*

The Bridgeland Vineyard is an expansive, undulating 200-hectare property with 100 hectares under vine wrapped around one of the largest water catchments in the Karridale sub-region. This is one of four vineyards owned by this winery.

The fruit was hand-picked and de-stemmed, with the berries left uncrushed to preserve the natural perfume of the fruit and allow for slow, controlled tannin and flavour extraction. The ferments were kept cold and pumped over twice a day for 8 days. The still-fermenting wines were then gently separated from their skins and allowed to finish ferment in a mix of old and new Burgundian-style oak barrels. The wines were then aged separately in oak for 14 months before bottling.

Expect a cool climate type Shyrach with a spicy entry of red fruits and meat spice, balanced with bright tannins and flavours of plum blossom and cracked allspice. There are also prominent aromas of chocolate on a mid-weight palate, with a velvety finish of fine tannins, with prominent minerality and natural acidity.

This is a splendid example of why you should cellar wines, for at nearly 10 years of age this wine is in the drinking zone right now. It is still remarkably fresh and vibrant and a joy to drink.

FOOD MATCHINGS

Rare Rost Beef, Slow Cooked Lamb Shanks in red wine sauce, Roast Lamb with lashings of Garlic and Lemon.

CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant the wine for 10 minutes before drinking. There is no need to cellar this wine any longer - Enjoy over the next 3-6 months.

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In 2001 John Streicker came to the Margaret River to start a winery business attracted by the lifestyle and reputation of the area. (I assume he had plenty of what the wine industry refers to as "Off Farm Income" for it is difficult to run a profitable wine business these days, if you are starting from nothing.) He began with one vineyard and over the next 10 years he increased this to four, including the very well-known Clairault Vineyard and cellar door which was planted in 1976 and was one of the first vineyards planted in the Margaret River area. So, they have plenty of good vineyards, with most of the fruit sold off to other winemakers in the area, plus they have access to one of the better contract winemakers in the region - Bruce Dukes. We have been a fan of his wines for a while, especially his own label *Domaine Naturaliste*. So, what does this wine taste like? In one word YUM. To start with, it has this lovely colour and then you have these chocolate / smoky aromas which explode out of the glass. It has an impressive length and weight and is just a thoroughly enjoyable glass of wine. A splendid example of why you should cellar wine if you have the opportunity. (My problem is that I tend to drink the wines I try to cellar after less than 12 months) At 10 years of age this wine is just a joy to drink.

The next Aussie wine is the **2022 A Rodda Cuvee de Chais (Cabernets) from Beechworth in central Victoria**. We have been drinking the wines of A Rodda for a while, but this Cabernet blend is one of his best yet. However, if we are being honest, his best wines are his Chardonnays. You see Beechworth is home to the great Chardonnay makers of Giaconda and Saveterre. These Chardonnays are not cheap, but well worth the effort. A Rodda's best Chardonnays are around the \$85 price range, whilst the Giaconda will set you back around \$100. These are some of the best expressions of Chardonnay in Australia. But their Cabernets are also mighty good.

Adrian Rodda has been making wine since 1998, almost entirely working with David Bicknell at Oakridge in the Yara Valley. He was involved in the development of the superb Oakridge 864 Chardonnay. At the start of 2010 he and wife Christie, a doctor, decided to move to Beechworth, Northeastern Victoria and so began the story of A Rodda Wines. This Cuvee de Chais is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (65%), Merlot (19%), Cabernet Franc (8%) and Petit Verdot (8%). It is exceedingly rare to have a straight Cabernet Sauvignon as it is known as the "Donut Wine" with a big hole in the middle palate, which is why the traditional Bordeaux blend is a mixture of Cabernet, Merlot, and others to fill out this hole. Every country that makes wine, makes a Cabernet blend and for good reason, they are extremely elegant, full bodied and compelling wines. Some are better than others and this wine from A Rodda is a great example. Expect to find a wine with plenty of red and purple fruits (think dark cherries and plums) with heightened aromas of violets and wild herbs. The supple fruit weight is seamlessly interwoven with fine, velvety tannins giving the wine great balance and finesse. A wine with plenty of complexity and structure.

The last red is from a winery in Italy that we have included before in an earlier Sommelier selection, but then it was one of their wines using non-traditional varietals of Cabernet and Merlot. This time we have gone for one of the traditional varietals, Sangiovese. The wine we have chosen is the **2021 Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona Rosso di Montalcino** from the Montalcino region of Tuscany in Italy.

Tuscany has a large reputation in Italian wine and is what most people consider when they think about Italian wines. The wines of Chianti and Chianti Classico are at the forefront, for these are the wines that have had the most success internationally over the past 30-40 years. However these are not the best wines from Tuscany, for that you need to head a little South to the region of Montalcino, home to Brunello di Montalcino and their little brother Rosso di Montalcino, plus the so called Super Tuscan wines from regions like Bolgheri and Chianti Classico, that use both Sangiovese and non-traditional grapes like Cabernet, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. But the Sangiovese's of Montalcino are probably the best and most expressive example of this grape variety from Tuscany and as you would expect they do have a price to match.

The Sangiovese grape is the most widely planted grape in the Montalcino region and is the only permitted grape in the Brunello di Montalcino and Rosso di Montalcino. These clones of Sangiovese are unique to the region and have developed and adapted to that area's specific terroir. They are referred to as Brunello or Sangiovese Grosso, some also call it Prugnolo Gentile. The altitude and climate of the Montalcino region has provided an area where Sangiovese ripens more fully and consistently than anywhere else in Tuscany. These factors contribute to the high quality of the wines. They tend to have a fleshy texture with aromas and flavours like blackberry, cherry, raspberry, chocolate, leather, and violets. They are medium bodied wines that offer elegance and grace rather than wines that are in your face. The Rosso Di Montalcino wines are made by all the wineries of the area as an early drinking style, generally from younger vines. The Brunello needs to be aged 5 years before release, with at least 2 years on oak, whereas the Rosso can be released after 1 year, but most of the good estates release after 2 years. So, it is easy to see why these wines are referred to as "Baby Brunello's." But do not let this moniker fool you, for these wines are sensational and offer a value for money that just cannot be beat. Whereas the Brunello's will range from \$100 - \$400, the Rosso's will range from \$50 - \$80.

The Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona estate is located on the southeast slope of the municipality of Montalcino. The estate has origins that date back to the 17th century and it maintains its historical heritage in a building called "Palazzo" (Palace) that was built by Fabivs de' Vecchis, Bishop of Montalcino and Abbot of Sant'Antimo Abbey. The modern era began in 1985 when the estate was bequeathed to the long-time manager of the estate Giuseppe Bianchini, who has been followed by his children and grandchildren. It is rightly regarded as one of the finest estates in the area. Their Rosso di Montalcino is not your regular Rosso. It is the top selection from a single vineyard of Sangiovese grapes from Ciacci Piccolomini's estate vineyards. It is a beautiful expression of Sangiovese, with bright red fruit and balsamic notes, and an excellent balance of silky-smooth tannins and acid. This is as close as you can get to Brunello quality while maintaining the Rosso di Montalcino DOC appellation.

So, there you have the latest four wines from Bullion Cellars. I hope you will enjoy the wines as much we have.

Matt, the Bullionaire.