



NEW DIRECTIONS IN WINE

PETER BARRY PAID AN AUSTRALIAN RECORD PRICE for riesling at a 1999 auction, spending \$300 on three bottles of 1977 Leo Buring DWG41 – a legendary wine from Clare’s famed Florita vineyard at Watervale. The 50-year-old managing director of Jim Barry Wines pulled the cork on the last of these ageing beauties in August to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the winery created by his late father Jim Barry. It formed part of arguably Australia’s greatest ever riesling tasting – featuring 20 Clare wines made by Jim Barry, John Vickery and others from 1972 to 1998 – reinforcing that Clare is home to some of Australia’s greatest white wines.

Peter recently commenced his fourth stint as president of the Clare Valley Winemakers Association and quickly wants to reinstate Clare at the forefront of wine drinkers’ appreciation and respect. His winery’s gala riesling tasting for assembled national press and wine dignitaries was designed as a step in this direction. He worries that Clare has become inconspicuous due to its modest consistency, while other regions make a big fuss of their rising star winemakers and new grape varieties. By comparison, Clare’s cluster of small wineries remains in the hands of the same families, upholding a commitment to excellence that is unwavering.

To draw attention to such benchmarks, Peter is mulling over quite a few bold ideas – staging an international riesling symposium in Clare, even creating a giant screw cap sculpture on the Riesling Trail bikeway to commemorate Clare’s uniform embracing of this closure for its rieslings in 2000. He points to Clare’s history of being unorthodox to win global recognition as a region focused on quality ahead of quantity. “There’s a huge future here – and it’s all based on our tradition,” says Peter. “The great wines from here – our rieslings, our cabernets, our shiraz – sit among the great wines of the world, and that’s the message we have to keep broadcasting.”

A COMPLETELY different take on winemaking is happening in a shed just south of Clare, where Colin McBryde, his wife Gen Gardiner and their pal Nic Bourke step far outside tradition to

make edgy, challenging wines under their Some Young Punks label. While the wines are made in Clare – home of the Gardiner family vineyard and boutique brand Adelina – fruit is sourced from many different districts, particularly McLaren Vale, where Nic works. “Whatever it takes to get the results,” says Colin, alluding to the brand’s gutsy red blends but also its brash pop art labels, “and if it’s not from our small vineyard in Clare, then so be it. We’re chasing ideas, and we don’t want to be hemmed in. As for the labels, we see them as a vehicle to get younger people interested in the booze, and we think it’s working.”

MATT GANT embraces these notions to an even greater extent. The gregarious English born winemaker with First Drop Wines is one of the dynamic successes of the young wine generation – buying the best fruit he can source across many districts, rather than being limited to only a few vineyards or grape varieties. This virtual winery model enables Matt and brand co-proprietor John Retsis to produce wines they get very excited about – from a suite of single vineyard expressions of Barossa shiraz, to bold blends featuring splashes of nebbiolo and barbera, montepulciano, touriga nacional and trincadeira.

During 2009, First Drop held a major showcase of its wines for leading Australian wine journalists – and instead of just blowing their own trumpet, Matt and John invited five dynamic winemakers from other companies (Colin McBryde, Gemtree’s Mike Brown, Bremerton’s Rebecca Willson, Bird in Hand’s Andrew Nugent and Barossa’s Tim Smith) to share the spotlight. “We aren’t the only ones making decent booze in South Australia,” says John. “We’re lucky to have so many talented and creative winemakers around us.” Everyone’s wines were tasted at a gala dinner, triggering robust discussions on appropriate grape varieties for certain Australian regions, blending, terroir, and how the new generation of winemakers can make a difference. “I don’t see these guys as my competitors,” says Matt. “The more people we involve in these intelligent conversations about wine, the better.”



SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IS FERMENTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S WINE REGIONS. WINE EDITOR DAVID SLY LOOKS AT KEY PERSONALITIES DRIVING LOCAL BRANDS IN EXCITING NEW DIRECTIONS.

This landmark First Drop dinner was held at Bird in Hand winery in Woodside, where Andrew Nugent makes bold, robust interpretations of cool climate wines. It's a smart contemporary Adelaide Hills signature, stubbornly celebrating cabernet sauvignon (with good reason), chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. Realising the Adelaide Hills region was not doing enough to capitalise on a surging thirst for New Zealand sauvignon blanc, Bird in Hand was instrumental in promoting the inaugural public launch of the Adelaide Hills sauvignon blanc vintage, featuring 24 producers pouring their 2009 wines for a large, interested audience in the Adelaide Central Market during October.

A NEW DISCUSSION among many McLaren Vale winemakers focuses on drawing greater attention to the region's distinctive features that characterise its wines as unique. Among several ideas, a detailed geological map is now being prepared by the McLaren Vale Winemakers Association, which highlights myriad soil types that define numerous sub-regions within the district. Underlining this specific geological and terroir interest was John Livingstone Learmonth, a British wine writer and expert on France's Rhone Valley, who was guest international judge at the 2009 McLaren Vale Wine Show. Taken on a helicopter ride to observe the region's layout, he was greatly surprised by its complexity, with ancient ironstone soils, rich clays and deep sands, rolling hills and flat plains within close proximity to the ocean. "The geology chart and the interest in defining the sub-regionality of wines will lead to more precision," he told a packed auditorium of winemakers during a fascinating wine tasting masterclass that compared leading Rhone and McLaren Vale wine styles. "Elegance and balance are aspects that take a drinker through the door to show specifically where these wines come from – ahead of the winemaker who has played with them."

This is already being embraced by the collective of winemakers involved in Vale Cru – a grand artisan showcase of 18 small batch wineries (most without cellar door outlets) which focuses on their

soil and terroir differences. It proved an instant hit, attracting more than 300 tasters and buyers to the Victory Hotel in September, and is likely to be repeated.

IN THE BAROSSA, Damien Tschärke (*above left*) is a new breed of winemaker whose great belief in the future doesn't focus on the Barossa's traditional Rhone grape varieties but instead on new Mediterranean grapes best suited to a changing climate. His ideas are based on research explored during his winemaking studies, and supported by his outstanding crops of tempranillo, savagnin, montepulciano and zinfandel through the past decade. The resulting wines, marketed through his Tschärke wine brand, chase the spectrum of fleshy, savoury flavours that are piquing the interest of many consumers. This is brave stuff, though Damien's dynamic energy and strident vision are backed by his fierce intelligence and a hunger to keep doing better. Watch as his ideas start to have wider influence: Damien recently joined the committee of the Barossa Winemakers Association.

COONAWARRA'S dominant stature in the Limestone Coast is being tempered due to the output of its impressive neighbours: Wrattenbully, Mt Benson and even sauvignon blanc and chardonnay wines from Mt Gambier. Prominent among the new stars is the Longbottom family that owns Henry's Drive winery at Padthaway. Having farmed this land since the 1940s, the Longbottoms diversified from sheep, cattle, cropping and onions to now include 300ha of vineyards – most grapes are sold to big wine companies, but a share of the best fruit is now retained for their own labels. These wines first came to notice with esteemed contract winemaker Chris Ringland producing their outstanding Pillar Box Red blend – it sells for less than \$10 – though Henry's Drive shiraz and cabernet also offer outstanding value for money. They stand as a lesson to other brands in delivering higher quality at lower prices, and demonstrate to drinkers there are many exciting new developments in South Australian wine to be found by those who go searching.

