

Corkscrew: wine review

May 09, 2018

Recently, I judged at the Concours des Grand Vins Blancs du Monde in Strasbourg. This is always an enjoyable experience mainly because of the camaraderie of the judges and, importantly, for the variation in wines from many different parts of the world.

There were 71 judges this year from 19 countries as diverse and from as far afield as Colombia, Canada, the US, all parts of Europe and *moi* from Oz. There were 12 panels, ours had two judges from Slovakia, one from Italy, two from France and me. Throughout this competition there is always an Organisation of International Viticulture (OIV) judge, or official, present to oversee the show and ensure it adheres to OIV standards.

All the judges start the session with an *amuse-bouche* where one wine, in this case a Riesling, is given to the whole room and each panel chair gives its verdict. No matter what each individual judge scores the wine, it is the consensus of the whole team of 71 judges that counts. In our panel's case it was 82/100, with the average of all panels being around the same mark. After the *amuse-bouche*, it's down to business.



Our first flight of wines was 11 rieslings, vintage 2015 to 2017. We gave seven silver medals and two gold. Interesting to note about this flight, there was one Australian wine that received no award while three rieslings from Kazakhstan were awarded silver.

Our second flight consisted of 12 pinot gris. This style can exhibit anything from pale green in colour to grey or light red, similar to rosé. While we gave four silver and three gold medals there was no award for five of the entries. A deep salmon pink wine that collected a silver medal was an Australian pinot gris.

The next flight was 12 Gewürztraminers, where we awarded five silver and two gold medals. I have to say that all three styles tasted – riesling, pinot gris and gewürztraminer — are favourites of mine.

The following day we tasted 11 wines in the class known as *cépage* (blended wines). Of the 11, our panel gave six silver and two gold medals. Next was a group of 12 Grand Cru rieslings and mature styles, wines that could only have come from European countries that follow this system, in this case France, Czech Republic and Slovakia. We gave four silver and four gold medals.

At the end of day two, we had 12 wines consisting of Grand Cru and mature pinot gris. It was an excellent class and a great way to finish with four silver and five gold medals awarded. Wine number three in this flight (a 2017 pinot gris from France) was awarded gold by all six judges.

On the final day, the winning wines were on display at the awards ceremony, which is held at the Palaise de Congress in Strasbourg. It's always good to go and look at other award-winning wines from the other panels. I tasted, for example, a beautiful riesling from Transylvania (in central Romania), which was a little short in

acidity but palatable all the same.

The Alsace wine route is well worth a visit should you find yourself in this neck of the woods. From Strasbourg to Colmar the drive is about 90 minutes with nearly all the beautiful towns and villages, including vineyards, found on the right hand side of the motorway as you drive south to Colmar.

Stand by for my next judging report, which will come to you from Bordeaux at the Citadelles Du Vin, another OIV event where, this year, Australia is the special guest of honour.

Robert Stein is a Mudgee-based winery established in 1976, where the first varieties planted were chardonnay, shiraz, riesling and gewürztraminer. The **2016 Reserve Chardonnay** displays a lovely youthful pale straw colour. The nose is rich and complex with stone fruits such as apricots and mangoes coming through with vanillin oak sitting nicely in the background. The palate is crisp and vibrant with the same fruits found on the nose. This is combined with citrus, and nicely packaged yeasty oak adds to the richness and complexity. The finish is dry with crisp acidity combined with extra layers of texture in the mouth (rrp \$40).

Look out for its stable mate the **2014 Robert Stein Shiraz**. Deep purple with a fading pink hue around the rim, the fruit on the nose gives way to blackcurrant, aniseed and earthy black peppery notes that smell delicious and draw you in. The fruit on the palate shows a mixture of red/blackberry fruits with raspberry flavours coming through. The oak is nicely handled while the tannins are a little earthy but soften as the wine opens up on a fruit-driven palate. It has depth of flavour with balanced acid/oak tannin structure with soft and juicy lingering fruit (rrp \$25).

For those of you who like “stickies”, look no further than the **Berton Vineyard Reserve 2016 Botrytis Semillon** from the style’s home, the world-renowned NSW Riverina. It is bright amber in the glass and the nose offers a lifted fruit salad-like spectrum of varietal flavours. On the palate the wine is fruity, dry and richly textured as one would expect from this style. Apricots, citrus, peach and honey flavours shine through, combined with mouth-watering acidity that adds to the textural mouth-feel. This sticky goes well with soft fruity cheeses, camembert and brie, or try it with honeyed prawns (rrp \$17 for 375ml).

Another of Berton’s wines is the **2015 Bonsai**, the vineyard’s flagship wine with shiraz grapes from High Eden, a sub-region of the Eden Valley in the Barossa. The wine is a deep inky black/purple colour with redolent pink rim. The fruit on the nose shows focused aromas of ripe, sweet red/black fruit, with subtle French oak adding to the allure. The fruit on the palate is silky and juicy with very good mouth-feel and palate length. Dark and red berry fruits combined with chocolate and savoury notes also come through. The finish is dry, full-bodied with balanced acid/oak/tannin structure. A wine of depth and complexity, and one for that special occasion (rrp \$40).

The **Morambro Creek Shiraz 2015** comes from the famed Padthaway region of South Australia and is made by the Bryson family, who established their property in the region, first as graziers, more than a century ago. They then moved into wine in 1994. The wine is a lively red/purple colour that gives way to a light-pink hue. The nose displays a very complex and perfumed bouquet. The fruit on the palate is savoury and spicy combined with other dimensions. Ripe tannins, which are nicely integrated with the mixture of red/black berry fruits, add to a potting mix of fruits, oak, alcohol, acids and tannins that are all part of the charm offensive of this full-bodied wine. Another quality Shiraz! (rrp \$35)

Finally, the **2014 Posh Plonk Vintage Sparkling Cuvee**. This winery is situated around Bethanga on the shores of Lake Hume in north-eastern Victoria. I have to say, the beautifully hand-packaged bottle is rather unique and would stand out among the din for this alone. It shows a light golden colour in the glass, as does the creamy mousse. Once poured, the mousse gives way to a fine bead that jumps all over the glass then quickly dissipates. The nose shows some age with ripe mandarin and nectarine together with yeasty/bready aromas. The fruit on the palate is rich and nicely flavoured with leesy characters adding to the mix. Green apple, citrus and grapefruit go hand in hand combined with hints of strawberry that all marry well to give the wine flavour, depth and maturity. Its finish is crisp and refreshing with firm acidity for an overall creamy mouth-filling experience (rrp \$39).

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