

WINE News

Small production, handcrafted wines from around the world: New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and England.



FEBRUARY 3, 2014 FEATURES

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English Method?

By Ryan Woodhouse

Everyone's familiar with the colorful story about how a monk named Dom Pérignon invented the method of producing sparkling wines in Champagne. However, evidence suggests that the technique was actually first substantively proven in England. In 1662, English scholar Christopher Merret presented a paper on the topic to the Royal Society. That was eight years before Dom Pérignon traveled to Champagne, 20 years before the French made their first sparkling wine and more than 60 years before the first Champagne house was created! After very rigorous tasting and selection we can now offer a very small quantity of today's exceptional English sparkling wines exclusively to K&L customers.

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South Africa's Next Wave

By Ryan Woodhouse

South Africa has a winemaking tradition that dates back to 1650. But there has never been a more exciting time to try some great "Saffa" wines than now. We are working directly with some very small properties that are at the leading edge of an artistic revolution in winemaking that's much like what we've seen here in California. These winemakers, many of whom are very young, are seeking out the country's most interesting plots of old vines in previously peripheral regions, and their hands-on but minimalist winemaking style is leading to some super interesting wines with great purity, minerality and authenticity.



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Like a Boomerang

By Jim Chanteloup

Last September I attended the first "Savour" event in Adelaide, South Australia. This three-day convention brought together 700 people from all over the globe, representing all elements of the wine industry. The event offered large-format presentations as well as smaller focus groups where I was on a panel for independent retailers. There were master classes for various varietals, regional diversity and older library wines. The message was clear: they want to regain the position they once had in the U.S. marketplace. I can say that after tasting around 800 wines in 12 days, the category is stronger than ever.

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New Zealand's Finest

By Ryan Woodhouse

Our top New Zealand Direct Imports are back in stock and ready to impress. Te Whare Ra is a small, certified organic and biodynamic practicing estate in Marlborough's Wairau Valley. Owners/winemakers Jason and Anna Flowerday bought a block of old vines, converted the estate to their own exacting viticultural practices and are making wines with amazing purity, textural quality and a powerful sense of place.

Te Mata is perhaps the most iconic estate in New Zealand. Family owned and operated since 1896, they have garnered acclaim for making some of the finest wines from anywhere in the world, and we are delighted to offer them exclusively to K&L customers.

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Méthode Champenoise...or “English Method”?

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Estate-grown English wines are now being taken seriously by the wine world. They have been winning international awards and regularly beating their French counterparts in blind tastings. Not surprising, really, since the vines grow in a very similar climate a mere 200 miles from the heart Champagne, and the soils share the same deep chalk vein that colors the White Cliffs of Dover.

During my last visit I contacted the top estates and compiled a grand tasting of dozens of wines. After tasting them thoroughly, the field was narrowed to four that I believe show the very best of what England has to offer. These are serious wines made with extremely careful fruit selection, traditional methods and extended lees aging. All of these wines are truly world-class.

Wiston Estate

Owned by the Goring Family since 1743, this magnificent but tiny 16-acre estate is situated on a steep chalk escarpment in the South Downs of West Sussex. Planted to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier, the estate is entirely hand-tended. Winemaker Dermot Sugrue uses only the finest handpicked clusters pressed in a traditional Coquard Press. The wines are pure, powerful and focused.

2010 Wiston Estate “South Downs Cuvée” Brut West Sussex (\$39.99)* Made from 45% Pinot Noir, 33% Chardonnay and 22% Pinot Meunier. Rested in top-quality Burgundian French oak barrels, two-and-a-half years on the lees; a low dosage of four grams per liter. Shows crisp orchard fruits and a vibrant minerality complemented by rich, toasty power and a very linear focus. A serious and structured wine with immense concentration of flavor.



2011 Wiston Estate “South Downs Rosé” Brut West Sussex (\$49.99)*

A blend of 57% Pinot Noir, 33% Chardonnay and 10% Pinot Meunier; two years on the lees; eight grams per liter dosage. Pure alpine strawberries and a stunning, creamy texture. Finishes with hints of crushed raspberries, warm brioche and vibrant minerality drawing the wine out immeasurably long on the palate. Pure delight!

Gusbourne Estate

This remarkable Kentish estate is rooted in a base of deep, sandy loam soils. The vineyards are sustainably farmed, the grapes are picked by hand, and the cellar team crafts the wines with artisanal attention to detail. Only a small amount of these wines, which reflect the uniqueness of their site on England’s south coast, are made.

2008 Gusbourne Estate “Brut Reserve” Kent (\$34.99)* Winner of the International Wine and Spirits Challenge (IWSC) trophy for Best for Sparkling wine in 2013. A rich and toasty wine with lots of lees notes, baked bread and warm apple pie. Lovely weight on the palate with superfine bubbles and baked orchard fruits taking center stage. Long persistence with impeccable balance on the palate.

Denbies Estate

Southwest of London in Surrey, Denbies Estate is one of the major players in England’s sparkling wine resurgence. Occupying some sites that have been planted to vines since Roman times, this estate enjoys south-facing aspects and deep, free-draining chalk soils.

2010 Denbies Estate “Cubitt Reserve” Blanc de Noir Brut Surrey (\$39.99)* A big, rich, powerful wine made from estate-grown grapes, 66% Pinot Noir. Excellent weight with a crowd-pleasing creamy style and toasty brioche notes. This is perfect for those looking for a bold “Champagne” style to serve with or without food. The pure, rich, red-fruited Pinot character is well balanced by the zesty acidity and toasted grain notes. A dense and powerful wine.

South Africa’s Next Wave

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Here are some awesome small South African producers that we work with. I highly recommend checking them out.

Alheit Vineyards

Chris and Suzan Alheit burst on to the scene last year with a 96-point WA Chenin Blanc, Cartology. They also won the *Platter’s Guide* “Winery of the Year” award. Here is this year’s offering—of which we got 10 of the 30 cases that were shipped to the U.S.! **2012 Alheit Vineyards “Cartology” Chenin Blanc Western Cape (\$34.99)** is an incredible wine composed of 86% Chenin Blanc and 14% Sémillon, all from old (50-plus year) dry-farmed vines. The wine has boundless energy and vibrancy. Fresh blossom on the nose, a palate of rich poached pears and apricots with brioche and almonds. Tons of mineral verve on the finish. 92+ points WA.

Crystallum Winery

These wines are made by the son of South Africa wine legend Peter Finlayson. Super interesting, with style to boot. The **2010 Crystallum**

“Paradisum” Rhône Blend, Paardeberg (\$32.99) is a classic Rhône blend (Syrah, Grenache and Cinsault) from old bush vines in Paardeberg. Very aromatic with floral notes, crushed berries, thyme and clove. Soft, juicy dark fruit with beautiful silky structure and a fresh vibrant acidity. Only 170 cases produced.

Botanica Wines

The Botanica wines are made by Ginny Povall, a Protea flower grower and exceptional winemaker. These are natural, small production wines that show a strong sense of place and lovely purity. The **2011 Botanica Chenin Blanc Western Cape (\$19.99)** is sourced from 50-plus-year-old Chenin vines in the dry, rugged region of Skurfburg a few hundred miles north of Cape Town. It has the perfect combination of rich stone fruits, toasted grains, fresh pear and granitic mineral presence. Other wines sourced from this amazing vineyard are \$40-plus. 91 points WA.

2010 Botanica Pinot Noir Elgin (\$19.99) The best expression of SA Pinot that I have tasted to date. Pure, rich, succulent dark red fruits, sweet spice, a touch of mesquite quality. Incredible value thanks to our direct relationship.

Like a Boomerang, Australia is Coming Back!

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The Chardonnays (particularly those from Margaret River, Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula) are showing more poise and refinement, with judicious oak treatment and great acidity. There were more Shiraz and Rhône Blends offering elegance, balance and purity. Also, Cabernet-Shiraz, a classic Australian blend, showed why it has endured (we tasted the 1966 Yalumba “Signature” and it’s still a stunner). From Margaret River and Coonawarra, where Cab and blends are benchmarks, examples from ’94, ’96 and ’98 were still singing gloriously.

It was great to catch up with old friends and make new contacts. That will, I hope, result in us continuing to present exciting new wines and resurgent old favorites. Given that the category showed significant growth in 2013, we believe we are on the right track in championing those who are philosophically on the path to honest wines of character, balance and a sense of place. One new contact that stood out was Simon Cowhan from Sons of Eden in the Barossa Valley. Simon, a veteran viticulturist at Yalumba, and his winemaking partner Corey Ryan (once at Henschke) have crafted wines of great purity and balance, showing classic Barossa power but with nothing overdone.

It was also great to see my old friend Peter Lynn from Majella in Coonawarra, and spend time with Vanya Cullen (Cullen), Sue Hodder (Wynn’s) and Virginia Willcock (Vasse Felix) at the Cabernet master class along with John Duval (Duval) and Chester Osborn (d’Arenberg).

Next I spent a week traveling with a small group on a cool climate itinerary that took us to Victoria and the regions of Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula, ending in Tasmania. We visited and had a master class at Oakridge (one of our Direct Import partners) where they’re producing stunning Chardonnay with a detailed acid line, balance and drive. Also lovely, elegant, restrained Pinot and Shiraz were standouts. Mornington Peninsula wineries continued to impress—Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are clearly their focus and future.

In a country so often referred to as “New World,” it was an eye-opener to visit small historic wineries like Yeringberg, the epitome of the “low tech” winery: “Yes, we have gravity flow. We open that window and run the hose down through it.” Cooling? “Yes, we wrap a blanket around the tank, run water over it and open the back doors in winter. It works!”

While much of this newsletter focuses on the smaller artisanal producers and how much we love to support and discover the “little guy,” our guiding philosophy is really about the pursuit of excellence. Spending time with Robert Hill Smith (fifth generation) from Yalumba and Chester Osborn (fourth generation) from d’Arenberg, who both make a lot of wine, showed me that neither their philosophy nor the quality of the wines has been compromised. Yalumba tasks a winemaker to each of their various wines, and run their own cooperage and vine nursery. At d’Arenberg they still foot tread their reds and use old basket presses because of the gentle extraction they achieve. Here’s a small selection to get you started on a rewarding venture through this big wine region:

2010 Hewitson “Miss Harry” Rhône Blend Barossa Valley South Australia (\$19.99) 94 points JH: “Predominantly Grenache and Shiraz, with small amounts of Mourvedre, Carignan and Cinsaut, sourced

from 25 separate vineyard plots, five over 100 years old... Medium-bodied, there is wonderful tension between the array of predominantly black fruits and the savoury tannins on the finish.”

2012 Oakridge “Guerin Vineyard” Chardonnay Yarra Valley Victoria (\$24.99)* 92+ points WA: “...scented of yuzu zest, orange blossom and fresh lime juice with touches of toast, struck match and clotted cream.”

2011 Oakridge 864 Single Block Selection “Drive Block: Funder and Diamond Vineyard” Chardonnay Yarra Valley Victoria (\$49.99)* 95 points JH: “Like all 864 chardonnays, whole bunch pressed direct to barrel for natural (wild yeast) fermentation, 30% of the oak new. The riper fruit aromas come through strongly on the bouquet and nectarine, white peach and melon flavours, grapefruit conspicuous by its absence.”

2008 Yalumba “Signature” Cabernet Sauvignon-Shiraz Barossa Valley S. Australia (\$39.99) 95 points JH, 92 points WS, 91 points RP: “...Reveals evolving notes of warm mulberries, plum preserve, creme de cassis and black olives with hints of sandalwood, spice box and tobacco. Medium to full bodied and elegantly fruited in the mouth, it’s very well structured with a medium to firm level of grainy tannins and good line of acid, finishing long and layered.”

2011 Yalumba “The Cigar” Cabernet Sauvignon Coonawarra South Australia (\$21.99) 90 points RP: “...Offers aromas of blackberries, black cherries and cassis with an undercurrent of fresh mint, cinnamon stick and dried herbs. Medium-bodied with just enough youthful, expressive flavor framed with lively acid and a medium-level of chewy tannins, it is finishing with a slight herbal lift.”



Amelia Park winemaker Jeremy Gordon takes a closer look at well-tended vines.

2010 Amelia Park Cabernet-Merlot Margaret River Western Australia (\$19.99)* 94 points JH: “Good colour; a serious yet elegant, medium-bodied cabernet merlot, perfectly framed and balanced, the blend wholly synergistic and seamless.”

2010 Amelia Park Shiraz Frankland River Western Australia (\$19.99)* 92 points JH: “Medium purple-red, a fragrant and lively wine... showing its cool climate breeding with its spicy, peppery black cherry and plum fruit; the fine tannins have a gently savoury twist, and French oak contributes its part.”

New Zealand Direct Imports

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2012 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$18.99)*

A fresh, zesty Sauv Blanc with great acidity and exotic aromatics. Crisp, racy, citrus qualities are beautifully balanced by a soft textural mid-palate from the extra lees contact and a barrel-fermented proportion.

2012 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Pinot Noir Marlborough (\$26.99)* This wine exhibits fragrant notes of ripe strawberry and cherry with hints of mocha, violets, spice. Very silky tannins. A balance of exuberant, juicy, pure fruit with subtle, savory layers of exotic spice, floral tones and deep forest floor accents. An easy wine to enjoy on so many levels.

2012 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Chardonnay Marlborough (\$26.99)* From a 32-year-old Mendoza clone planting famous for small berries and intense flavor concentration. Fermented in large French oak puncheons. Shows beautiful rich baked orchard fruits, toasty oak and lovely lingering lees quality punctuated by subtle mineral accents. Exceptional.

2012 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Riesling “D” Marlborough (\$18.99)* Dry Riesling at its finest. Bright flavors of fresh lime juice, lemon sorbet and ripe grapefruit with hints of floral spice. A lovely soft texture on the palate but with driving acidity and persistence. Not austere; delicate yet powerful. Lovely wine, a real staff favorite.

2013 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Riesling “M” Marlborough (\$18.99)* Orange blossom, lime and white peach with underlying mineral notes. Amazing balance—it’s hard to believe that this wine has 30 grams per liter sugar, but the remarkable 9.5 grams per liter acidity balances it perfectly. This wine gives the best German Spätlese a serious run for their money!

2011 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Syrah Marlborough (\$29.99)* This is an ultra-cool-climate, old-school Syrah with a tiny 140-case production. The nose is full of violets, flowers and black pepper with undertones of dry-cured meat and hard ground spice. Mid-weight with dark berry fruit and silky fine-grained tannins. Long and focused on the palate.

2012 Te Mata Estate “Cape Crest” Sauvignon Blanc Hawke’s Bay (\$19.99)* One of New Zealand’s top barrel-fermented Sauv Blancs, this white Bordeaux-style blend reveals intense aromas and flavors of citrus blossom and crunchy pear with subtle accents of baked bread and oak spice. Fantastic texture and length.

2012 Te Mata Estate “Elston” Chardonnay Hawke’s Bay (\$24.99)* Rich, ripe stone fruit and creamy, toasty oak. The wine’s forward personality is checked by a firm acidity that keeps it long on the palate. Corton-like richness and power with underlying structure and acidity.



Jason and Anna Flowerday in the buckwheat at organic-certified Te Whare Ra

2010 Te Mata Estate “Coleraine” Bordeaux Blend Hawke’s Bay (\$49.99)* 96 points BC, 93 points JS. Dubbed “New Zealand’s Sassicaia” by James Suckling, this Bordeaux-style blend has a proven 20-plus year aging potential. A flavor profile like fine Pauillac, with crushed mint, concentrated berry fruits, graphite and tobacco. Powerfully structured to age but with elegant poise and precise balance. One of a kind.

2011 Te Mata Estate Merlot-Cabernets Hawke’s Bay (\$16.99)* This is a delicious Right Bank-style blend of estate-grown Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Medium to full-bodied with a lovely concentration of crushed bramble fruits and black currants complicated by subtle notes of pencil shavings, cedar and Graves-like minerality. An exceptional value.

2011 Te Mata Estate “Awatea” Cabernets-Merlot Hawke’s Bay (\$24.99)* Second only to the Coleraine, Awatea is a selection from highly regarded estate parcels, made in slightly more generous, less structured style. Very deep, rich, dark fruits, boysenberry, sweet leather, warm earth and toasted spices. The tannins are ripe and wrapped in soft fruit. Drink now to 2020 or beyond.

2010 Te Mata Estate “Bullnose” Syrah Hawke’s Bay (\$32.99)* 97 points BC. This is the most iconic Syrah in all of New Zealand. A single vineyard selection of only the best fruit. Incredible concentration of lush, dark red fruits. Pure, elegant and full bodied. Aromas of Asian spice, cigar box and a touch of quality French oak. Just a hint of meaty Syrah character and grip keep it from being all purity and silk. Unbelievably good and in very limited supply.

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