

GEMS IN THE VALE WINE LAND

It was not the first time a Shiraz wine was awarded the top ward at the McLaren Vale Wine Show, yet Shiraz is not the only red varietal that rules the vineyards. I personally envisage Grenache as another potential signature red grape that will give Shiraz a run for its reign.

Grenache impresses me with its lush fruitiness yet it is balanced and fresh, veering towards a pretty and charming expression as compared to the heavy-framed Shiraz.

Dissimilar to Barossa Valley's expression of this Southern Rhone varietal, McLaren Vale's Grenache seems to align more towards a Pinot Noir-like expression, with lightness of being, aromatic nose, focused fruit notes and mouth-feel being the core of its character.

Selectively, Cabernet Sauvignon can be delicious (especially the Chapel Hill Gorge Block Cabernet Sauvignon, a single vineyard wine that reminded me much of a St Helena, Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon), though it must be mentioned that some of the Vale's Cabernet character may offer green, stalky, mint note, which may not be every wine lovers' cup of tea.

With regards to the quest for the suitable grapes for the Vale, Mike Brown, winemaker of Gemtree Vineyards, commented that "As much as we appear to experiment with several varietals; from the climatic condition and all other aspects of the region, we think the Mediterranean grapes, in general, works well here in McLaren Vale."

Organic and biodynamic farming have taken off in McLaren Vale, with increasing awareness and an adoption of environment friendly practices. A great example in illustrating such environment sensitivity is Gemtree Vineyards wetland that creates a haven for natural habitats and protected native trees and plantation.

Though McLaren Vale can claim to be the home of a star-studded list of wine estates, such as Chateau Reynella, Tintara, Noon Estate, d'Arenberg, Kay Brothers Amery, Chapel Hill, Shirvington, Mr Riggs, Leconfield, Mitolo, Mollydooker, Tatchilla, Wirra Wirra; the regional wines are, unfortunately, constantly overshadowed by its neighbour – Barossa Valley.

Nevertheless, I have listed some wines that exhibit qualities which, in my opinion, will make a splash in Asian market. Unfortunately, due to practicality and space constraint, the list cannot be an exhaustive one.



GEMTREE VINEYARDS OBSIDIAN SHIRAZ 2007 The signature wine of Gemtree Vineyards and pride of Mike and Melissa Brown. Winemaker Mike aspires to craft a high quality wine that speaks of its origin; while careful plant cultivation, increasingly biodynamic in approach, have been carefully nurtured by Melissa, the vineyard manager.

SCARPANTONI BROTHERS BLOCK CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2008 An award winning wine in the 46th edition McLaren Vale Wine Show; this wine impresses with the juiciness of the varietal, with imitable blackcassis and blackcurrant flavours, yet it lands gently on one's palate with balanced intensity. Charming, delicious and 'bloody' good.

CHAPEL HILL THE CHOSEN HOUSE BLOCK, MCLAREN VALE, SHIRAZ 2008 AND CHAPEL HILL GORGE BLOCK, MCLAREN VALE, CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2009 were two of the three single vineyard wines that the winery has embarked on. The talented and down-to-earth Michael Fragos was able to bring freshness, balanced and flavour intensity into those single vineyard wines. I personally would have put all his single vineyards wines in my cellar. In the same tasting session, I was also charmed by the **CHAPEL HILL MCLAREN VALE MOURVEDRE 2009**, seemingly simple and innocent, especially when standing next to the three single-vineyard wines. The Mourvedre distinguishes its uniqueness with freshness and pleasant intensity.

LA CURIO RESERVE BUSH VINE GRENACHE 2009 was chosen by me to receive the International Judge Trophy. Adam Hooper is the distinguished individual that crafts this wine like an artist. With an appearance akin to a rock singer, Hooper was able to handcraft this wine by not only displaying its pretty nuances, but also showcasing its finesse and elegance.

OLIVERS TARANGA, SMALL BATCH, CADENZIA GRENACHE 2008 AND OLIVERS TARANGA, SMALL BATCH, TEMPRANILLO 2009 were two of the many wines that Corrina Wright made. Those two wines belonged to a new concept 'Small Batch', which naturally refers to special lot of wines made not only with limited quantity but also with special attention given by Wright. Both wines displayed not only primary character of its grape; it also captivates drinkers with its charm without overwhelming the palate. Intense, balanced and appealing.

COATES WINES ORGANICALLY GROWN MCLAREN VALE SYRAH 2006 This has won many accolades and favourable reviews. The maker is also an achiever in its academic pursuit for know-how and expertise. Possibly the only winemaker I know that has a long list of post-nominal after his name, Duane Coates is not only making his own wines, he consults and make wines for others too. As if one day is worth more than 24 hours, Coates is also pursuing the Master of Wine program. This wine exhibited clean flavours, fruit purity, freshness and is a definite food wine.