

Showcasing Victoria's Wines

Seldom do I get the chance to present a selection of Victoria's wines to overseas guests – in this case Mike and Sue Veseth of Wine Economist www.wineeconomist.com fame. Mike and Sue are from Tacoma Washington and Mike was a keynote speaker at the recent Savour Australia www.savour-australia.com conference in Adelaide where our local wine industry showcased itself to the world.

Mike is professor emeritus of International Political Economy at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. He is an authority on the political economy of globalization and the global wine market.

He's also editor of The Wine Economist blog - a blend of keen economic insight and often irreverent and, dare I say, whimsical *winespeak*.

Mike is also the author of more than a dozen books including best-selling *Wine Wars* (2011) and the just released *Extreme Wine* – both of which are on my summer holiday reading list and both of which I shall review.

In regard timing, it was a bit of a risky undertaking serving a selection of wines from Victoria as Mike and Sue had come from tasting a bewilderingly large range of Aussie wines from 150 wineries covering 30 regions.

These included James Halliday's www.winecompanion.com.au 'Wine of the Year' producer - Bass Phillip, as well as his 'Winery of the Year' - Penfolds, - his 'Dark Horse of the Year' - Singlefile Wines and his 'New Winey of the Year' - Rob Dolan Wines.

Other wineries at this Savour Australia tasting included such prominent Australian labels such as Jacob's Creek, St. Hugo, Wolf Blass, Hardy's, Yalumba, Grosset, Henschke, Leeuwin Estate, De Bortoli and Tyrrell's – to name but a few.

Chances are their palates would be jaded and that, more than likely, they would have sampled the best of the Mornington Peninsula Pinots, Yarra Valley Chardonnays and what's commonly regarded as one of the best whites in Australia – Rick Kinzbrunner's incomparable Giaconda Chardonnay from Beechworth.

So it would have been folly to try and compete and get caught up in trying to *better the best* as it were – besides, taste is both subjective and personal; wine styles vary enormously and contextually much depends on the food wine is served with and the company it's served in.

So, despite what some wine snobs would have us believe, there are no definitive rights or wrongs when it comes to choosing wines – the key criteria on this occasion was to select wines that I enjoy and enjoy sharing - in the hope my guests would do likewise.

Besides, I rarely drink alone and get a real buzz out of sharing.

The real challenge came in selecting a representative sample of different wine varietals and styles from as many Victorian regions as possible – keeping in mind Victoria’s undoubted reputation for the likes of liqueur fortified wines from Rutherglen.

In that respect Rutherglen selected itself, as did the Yarra Valley Chardonnay, the Henty sparkling; the Heathcote Shiraz - and for its uniqueness, the Hanging Rock Macedon NV Brut LD Cuvee V111 sparkling from the Macedon Ranges. (See full list below).



The rationale being that Victoria is blessed with an excellent variety of Chardonnays, Pinot Noir, Shiraz and Riesling covering a diverse range of styles. For example, it was a given that the Morris of Rutherglen Old Premium Rare Liqueur Muscat was selected to round off the evening (it is quintessentially Victorian and uniquely Australian).

At the other end of the spectrum - it was much more of a challenge to choose two Victorian bubbly as our reputation in this category does not *sparkle* (forgive the pun) as much as Tasmania’s cool climate Pinot Noir-driven bubbly. Hence the Seppelt Salinger Vintage Cuvee 2009 opened the batting - and was followed at first drop by the Hanging Rock Macedon NV Brut LD Cuvee - a selection that met with universal acclaim and approval.

I have long thought Salinger to be underrated and was familiar with the Seppelt Salinger Vintage Cuvee 2009 with its excellent, cool climate, predominately Henty fruit - however had not previously tasted the Hanging Rock Macedon NV Brut LD Cuvee V111, though had often had a Hanging Rock NV bubbly before.

Yes – I know that many wine aficionados insist the only serious wines are reds and by implication everything else is frivolous or diminutive (especially sparkling wine and rosé) - so it’s no easy job any wine to be first cab off the rank as it were, especially when it comes to serving good fizz.

If your opening bracket of wines fails to excite then it can cast a gloomy shadow on what's to follow – first impressions and all that...

Both the Salinger and the Hanging Rock NV Brut LD Cuvee V111 opened up beautifully and although it's unfair to draw comparisons between a 2009 Vintage and a late disgorged, aged bubbly that's been on lees for neigh on 14 and a half years (they are different but beautiful beasts) both presented at their progressive best and did their makers and regions proud. Both were exquisitely blended from top quality fruit and both were exceptional.

Now for the whites – A Fratelli* 2010 Red Saint Yarra Valley Chardonnay and a Ros Ritchie Hand-Picked 2009 Riesling from Mansfield in the Upper Goulburn. Both came up trumps and elicited an extremely positive response judging by the collective smiles, sips, swirls and near empty glasses. Again exceptional fruit, exceptionally well handled - resulting in textural wines of finesse and delicate, characteristic, varietal flavour. (The Ros Ritchie Hand-Picked 2009 Riesling just pipped a Crawford River 2012 Riesling from the up and coming Henty region).



They were accompanied by a smoked salmon dish.

*Fratelli winemaker Andrew Santarossa is a relatively new kid on the block, but if this 2010 Red Saint Yarra Valley Chardonnay is anything to go by, his future looks promising. As for Ros Ritchie, I have long been a fan of her aromatic whites including her Gewürztraminer and Riesling – and watch out for her emerging reds including a 2011 Tempranillo and a recently-released, racy 2012 Nebbiolo. She is also making some good wine under the (as yet little-known) Barwite Friday's Child label.

So far so good, the bubbies and whites set the scene for what was to come and had the dinner finished there and then it would have been memorable.

How time flies when you are having fun! Mike and Sue were suitably relaxed as were our friends Roger and Lorraine (both of whom enjoy good wine and affable company) on both counts the dinner was going swimmingly.

Now for middle order – the reds – (where many a metaphorical game, vinous or otherwise, is won or lost). A young Mornington Peninsular Pinot was first off the blocks – the Ballewindi Vineyard 2012 Pinot Noir – Kooyong Wines – followed by a wine Roger had brought which fortunately slipped seamlessly into the bracket, namely a Bannockburn 2006 Bruce Cabernet- Merlot & Shiraz Blend from Geelong.



And to complete the reds came a Jasper Hill 1998 Georgia's Paddock Heathcote Shiraz which (despite a crumbly cork which my red splatted shirt revealed, - was a bummer to extract) lived up to its esteemed reputation and drank extremely well, as did the younger Bannockburn 2006 Bruce Cabernet- Merlot & Shiraz Blend. I was pleased that smidgen of Cabernet and a modicum of Merlot weaved their way into the evening.



Jasper Hill was making quality Shiraz long before most had heard of Heathcote.

It was an exercise in not only varietal comparison – a young pinot, a youngish cab-merlot blend and an older Shiraz – but also of age - a 2012, followed by a 2006 then a 15 year old (1998). Think I caught the Jasper Hill just in time as it had ullaged a bit – but never the less (to my great relief) drank well. I had a Strathbogie Ranges 2008 Plunket Fowles The Rule Shiraz (made by the talented Sam Plunkett) in reserve.

Sadly the same could not be said for the Ballewindi Vineyard 2012 Pinot Noir (a Vintage Cellars own label) which was suprisingly rather one dimensional, missing in the middle palate and with an aftertaste that tapered off rather than satisfied. Local, succulent spring lamb cutlets with Dauphinoise potatoes and a mixed, lightly dressed green salad complemented the reds.

Onto dessert - a panna cotta with freshly roasted rhubarb paired with a Brown Brothers 2008 Patricia Late Harvested Noble Riesling – a marriage made in heaven!

The evening whizzed by and thankfully the *winespeak* was not overly analytical or too technical – rather, it was much more about having good fun and relaxed, animated, conversation.

Finally, it was time to bring the evening to a close with the Morris of Rutherglen Old Premium Rare Liqueur Muscat – served with 72% Ghana dark chocolate, Rose Turkish Delight & coffee. The Morris proved an exceptional and intensely satisfying wine in every respect.

Made from Rutherglen Brown Muscat grapes, the base material of which dates back approximately 25 years – without peer and pure bliss – as was the entire evening.





Relaxed, convivial company, amiable conversation, good food and fine wines combined to make for a memorable, fun evening – that’s what enjoying wine, in this case local wine, is all about - sheer enjoyment!

In all, nine different wines were served from nine Victorian regions (in alphabetical order) Geelong, Heathcote, Henty, King Valley, Macedon Ranges, Mornington Peninsular, Rutherglen, Upper Goulburn and the Yarra Valley.

My only regret was that I couldn’t squeeze in a sparkling red – thus the likes of the recently-released Seppelt Great Western 2004 Show Reserve and the Mount Langi Ghiran Cliff Edge NV Sparkling Shiraz can consider themselves hard done by in not making the cut.

Mike & Sue Veseth – Wine Economist – Victorian Wines Dinner

Sparkling

Seppelt Salinger Vintage Cuvee 2009 - 12% alc - Seppelt Great Western (70% Henty & 5% Mornington Peninsula fruit).

Hanging Rock Macedon NV Brut LD Cuvee V111 – 12% alc Disgorged 9/8/2012 14yrs & 4 months after bottling. John Ellis. Newham, Macedon Ranges

Whites

Fratelli – 2010 Red Saint Yarra Valley Chardonnay - 13.5% alc - Andrew Santarossa (Yea) Yarra Valley fruit.

Ros Ritchie Hand-Picked 2009 Riesling (Gumbleton’s Vineyard) Boorolite, Mansfield 11.5% alc Upper Goulburn Region

Reds

Ballewindi Vineyard 2012 Pinot Noir – Kooyong Wines – 13.5% alc – Sandro Mosele Mornington Peninsula

Bannockburn 2006 Bruce Cabernet- Merlot & Shiraz Blend 14% alc – Geelong Region

Jasper Hill 1998 Georgia’s Paddock Heathcote Shiraz – Heathcote 15.5% alc - Ron Laughton

Dessert

Brown Brothers 2008 Patricia Late Harvested Noble Riesling – 11% alc – Milawa – King Valley

Morris of Rutherglen Old Premium Rare Liqueur Muscat – 17% alc – Rutherglen.
(Served after dinner with 72% Ghana dark chocolate, Rose Turkish Delight & coffee)

Water - Cape Grim Natural Sparkling Rainwater – Cape Grim, Tasmania

2045 words