

Torzi Matthews, Frost Dodger Shiraz 2004 Eden Valley

5 Dec 2006 by JR

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As you may know by now, I do get cross when people dismiss Australian wine as a slick, soulless, corporate, technological construct. Domenic Torzi is typical of the new generation of Australian wine artisans, hand-making wine from a small patch of vines, taking an extraordinary risk by planting vines in a frost pocket on the gentle slopes of Mt McKenzie in the Eden Valley because he and his partner Tracy Matthews were convinced that the naturally low yields on the poor soils here and the particular flavours were worth risking the frosts that had driven those who originally planted vines here in the early 20th century away. Their ten hectares of vines went into the ground in 1996 and Domenic, from an Italian family that settled on the Adelaide Plains in the 1950s and have been making olive oil, and wine for home consumption, for some time, was anxious to get to grips with a really special piece of land.

So much is made of the Barossa and to a lesser extent Clare Valleys that the beautiful Eden Valley, its unpaved roads lined with gums, is often overlooked. Yalumba and Henschke are the king and queen. Torzi Matthews is definitely an upstart serf. But I have now tasted two vintages of his exceptional Frost Dodger Shiraz and can report that it's definitely worthy of international attention. Here are my two sets of notes:

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Dark crimson. Interesting mix of mountain cool and treacle/molasses fruit on the nose. Very smooth and soothing on the palate yet fresh too. Holds its 14.5% alcohol very well. Lovely refreshing finish with real character. The grapes were part-dried before fermentation but it is a tribute to the care taken that the wine is still lovely and fresh. This was delicious with little bits of pancetta pinched from my son's supper plate.

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Lots here and certainly not just alcohol. Dense, sleek, savoury. Obviously has structure too. This would be great on a cold day with food... 14.5%

Interesting that I mention food in both these notes, written more than a year apart in very different circumstances (the 2004 when trying the wine at home, the 2003 at the end of a big Australian primeur tasting organised ages ago by Bordeaux Index and Cellar Door of Overton, Hampshire whose tasting notes are being added to the database but are so old I haven't the gall to publish them as an article). Clearly the Italian heritage and culture of producing wines specifically to drink with food is explicit in this unusual wine.

As you might expect, it's not desperately cheap. Bordeaux Index is selling both vintages at £195 a case in bond and the recommended retail price in the US is \$54.95 although the Australian price at the cellar door of Aus \$30 a bottle is more like it. Here are Domenic's own unedited notes about the 2004:

..All I can say is as this wine was aging in its youth it showed me the dream that would come early..7 vintages early..a flavour styling that I wanted to achieve by my 10th vintage of Frost Dodger Shiraz..its an amazing wine and credit goes to this 1996 estate planted Mt McKenzie block in the Eden Valley and off course the season that it melded with it.

It all started with an average winter which was a relief after the 2003 drought which was the fourth worst in history. December was lovingly hot for my site, with January cooling off to what was to be the coolest in twelve years, the vines still hadn't had a drink and the crop was light with small loosely berried bunches, just the way I like it. Then the rollercoaster continued with February recording record heat which really got things going in the stress department of the life of the vine in this harsh country, but hey what a great vintage it's going to be from where I was standing. March and April brought some much needed cooling off with amazing bright days for the perfect ripening with natural holding acidity.

Fruit was harvested during the last week of April and boy was it ready, we picked and racked, picked and racked all day, it was a day to remember this is going to be an awesome 2 years caring for this 2004 Vintage red to the end.

Once again natural wild fermentation, no acid adjustment, partially whole bunch open ferment, basket pressed, using the finest French oak and sprinkling of American. 2 years a sleeping beauty and off course unfiltered when bottled, naturally!

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The US importer Grateful Palate is also a retailer and The Frost Dodger is available directly from them for shipping to most states by phone order via 1-888 472-5283.

Cellar Door has the 2002 Frost Dodger (which I have not tasted) for £25 a bottle.

Torzi Matthews also make a very fine **Frost Dodger Riesling** which deserves ageing and is barely more than half the price of the Shiraz.

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