


Luddite Shiraz 2001/2 Western Cape

18 Nov 2003 by JR

 Here's a name to watch, and a label to smile at. Penny and Niels Verburg (pictured, *mit* bottle) founded Luddite Wines in nov 1999 with the sole aim of making world-class Shiraz. They're far from the only South African winemakers with this aim in view and to my mind most South African Syrah/ Shiraz (it's called both) has quite a way to go before it reaches the heights of the best South African reds made from Bordeaux grapes. But to judge from the quality evident in this early release from bought-in grapes, the fruits of their own 10- hectare/25- acre hillside vineyard in cool Walker Bay should be very special when the first vintage, 2004, is eventually released.

This particular wine is emphatically not a cool- climate Shiraz. In fact it's a great wallop thing with 15.5 per cent alcohol from a warmer- than- usual vintage and from unirrigated vineyards in the warmish regions of Malmesbury and Bottelary in Stellenbosch. I would normally expect to find this all a bit too much but the balance is great and the wine, despite its youth, awfully easy to drink.

Here, for detail freaks, are the winemaker's notes on vinification:

The grapes were cooled overnight in a cold store, crushed and destalked the next day into open cement fermentation tanks. Allowed to cold macerate for three days then inoculated with sourced Rhône yeast. Cap was punched down every four hours to ensure better extraction. Average fermentation temperature was 24 deg C. Once fermented dry, the wine was pressed with the horizontal basket press into tank where it underwent malolactic fermentation. Barrels were 30 per cent new, 50 per cent second fill and 20 per cent fourth fill. 75 per cent French Allier and 25 per cent American barrels were used. Total of 12 months in barrel. Wine was racked and given a light filtration before bottling.

Total production: 12,600 bottles
Release Date: 1 oct 2003
Analysis:
Alcohol 15.5 per cent
Total Extract 37g/l
Residual Sugar 2.12g/l
pH 3.62
Volatile acid 0.64g/l
Free sulphur dioxide 30ppm
Total sulphur dioxide 80ppm

(I wonder, by the way, when I'll next read, 'wine was given a humdinger of a filtration and fined so heavily it had nothing left in the bank'?)

Anyway, believe me that this wine is a triumph of flavour over alcohol - no added water here - with real backbone as well as tons (six to the hectare/2.4 to the acre) of spicy fruit. More leathery than the average New World Syrah but nothing like a North Rhône wine.

The back label carries the following message: 'Luddism reflects our belief in winemaking where we choose to practise our craft conscientiously and thereby retain our individuality. Technology and mechanization will never be a substitute for passion.' Amen.

Unfortunately the wine is not widely available (this wine of the week is more to signal that this is a name to notice).

In the UK the 2001, not quite as plump with similar convincing ripe Syrah character, is delicious and available at £15.95 from www.winemessenger.com.