

## John Duval Plexus 2004 Barossa Valley

8 Aug 2006 by JR  
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The big companies in Australia may have lost their lustre in a dust-storm of heavy discounting, dumping and over-zealous reliance on promotions but that doesn't mean there isn't a wealth of winemaking talent among those who used to make wine for them. Steve Pannell and Larry Cherubino come most immediately to mind but no big company winemaker was more heavily promoted at one stage nor, arguably, more competent than John Duval. For many years he was, as it says approximately on the back label of this wine, 'heavily involved in making one of Australia's most famous wines'. Throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, John Duval was Penfolds Grange, and an articulate and unusually mild-mouthed exponent of it around the world.

Now he has gone solo but, with all that wealth of experience behind him, he not only knows exactly how to make good wine, he also knows exactly where to find the best grapes and will have forged long term relationships with the old boys of the Barossa who can supply them. The **2004 Plexus** is his second release of this skilful blend of 49% Shiraz, 27% Grenache and 24% Mourvedre. The Shiraz comes from "old vines to the north of the valley in the Stockwell and Light Pass region and from the Krondorf area, Grenache from old bush vines 50-60 years old near Rowland Flat, and Mourvedre from old bush vines in the Light Pass region and from a very low yielding younger vineyard near Ebenezer". Barossa Valley Kremlinologists will know exactly to which vineyards he refers presumably.

Barossa reds are not always to my taste. They can be too syrupy, hot, muscular and tough for me. But this one I found seriously well crafted, expressing Barossa's extreme heat and slightly medicinal quality but with great gentleness and approachability. Toasty, round, mellow with strong treacle toffee or molasses notes, it certainly doesn't taste aggressively of its 14.5% alcohol. (Low alcohol Barossa is as oxymoronic as low alcohol port.)

This is a wine in which the new (French) oak is a very minor ingredient in a deliberate attempt to allow the fruit and Valley to sing. It has deliberately been designed for the next eight to 10 years although it is already a very approachable drink. We enjoyed it with a wide range of main courses at the new Kirketon Grill in Sydney last week but be warned, this wine needs quite substantial food - and is NOT to be sipped without food on a hot summer's evening. John Duval's first release of a varietal Shiraz, **Entity 2004**, is also now on the market but I have not tasted it. I wonder how long it took him to find two such strong abstract nouns that had not already been registered?

The wine is imported into the UK where it retails for around £17 by Liberty and into the US (around \$35) by Old Bridge Cellars of Napa. But it is much more widely distributed according to winesearcher. Just click on the link below.  
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