Kreglinger Vintage Brut 1999 Tasmania

22 Jan 2006 by JR

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I taste many sparkling wines from outside the Champagne region and am constantly looking out for something that will deliver the same degree of finesse with satisfying complexity. I will sound horribly chauvinistic when I say that I truly believe that the English producers **Nyetimber** and occasionally **Ridgeview** can deliver this – although they need considerable bottle age. Local enthusiasm has been endorsed by the odd producer from the Champagne region who, reported with excessive glee in the British media, has invested in vineyard land in southern England – supposedly in anticipation of the continued effects of global warming.

My wine of this week comes from the southern rather than northern limits of the world's viticultural map, from the cool, green island of Tasmania off the Australian mainland, cooled by many a current from the Antarctic. Many of Australia's finer fizzes have long depended on ingredients from this offshore state but this, like Pirie and Jansz, whose owners have included Roederer and Yalumba, is a fully acknowledged 100 per cent Tasmanian product.

It's not cheap. In Australia it retails for the equivalent of about £13 or over US$20 and in the UK it is about £20, but I'm flagging it up as seeming to me to demonstrate very serious quality indeed. This Kreglinger 1999 had lovely pure zesty acidity but also the depth of flavour and creaminess that only good base wine and careful ageing on lees will bestow. It happily stood comparison with a non vintage champagne at the same price and has none of the excess sweetness, alcohol, astringency or acidity that, individually, so often mar sparkling wines from outside the classic regions.

This 1999 may of course be a flash in the pan but I saw the beginnings of this Flemish-owned Australian wine operation, now called Norfolk Rise, in Mount Benson on the Limestone Coast in South Australia some years ago and can attest to their seriousness of intent. (The firm behind it is vaguely related to the Thienponts of Pomerol, but there is no professional relationship.)

Kreglinger Vintage is the sparkling wine that replaced Pirie fizz after Kreglinger bought Pipers Brook Vineyards and the cheaper Ninth Island label to add to their wine portfolio. The wine was made by Rene Bezemer, who worked with Tasmanian pioneer Andrew Pirie for near to 10 years. Viticulturist Bruce McCormack is another Pirie protégé.

The Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes were grown on closely spaced vineyards specificlly groomed for sparkling wine, on mainly basalt soils in the Pipers Brook and Pipers River districts in the far north of the island. They all face away from the sun, east southeast, which gives an average degree-day total, the all-important Winkler tally, of 950–1050, pretty comparable to the Champagne region's 1030.

The grapes were harvested in late March at between 10 and 11 Baumé and we are assured were fully ripe despite their 10-12 gm/litre of titratable acidity. Strictly 450 litres per tonne of free- run juice were used from whole bunch pressed grapes *à la champenoise*. Base wines were fermented in both barrel and tank, and a small percentage was aged on lees before the blend was made in dec 99. It was then aged on the lees in bottle until it was disgorged in late 04.

UK stockists include the redoubtable Noel Young plus Red and White and Noble Rot. It's worth looking out for.

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