

The Hedonist Shiraz 2005 McLaren Vale

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I may well lead a sheltered life but this is the first wine I have ever seen so obviously labelled 'biodynamic' . That's in big letters on the back label. On the front is the thoroughly appealing name of **The Hedonist Shiraz 2005 McLaren Vale** plus, inexplicably (to me), a fine pen and ink drawing of a pig, not unlike that of Fergus Henderson's St John restaurant in London that is so proud of its 'nose to tail' food. This is nose to glass wine.

The name and alcohol level on the label (14.5%) might suggest something thoroughly over the top but this wine is far from that. The hedonism comes from the pure pleasure of sipping this delightfully approachable and civilised Shiraz from the Winterfold vineyard in the hills above Willunga in the southern, more ocean-cooled sector of McLaren Vale. Far from a syrup or tough tincture, this wine tingles with life and manages to be beautifully balanced for current drinking while not being sweetened up or vapid. It has that glossy McLaren Vale ripeness with some real finesse. About a quarter of the must was run off to finish fermentation in barrels. The majority of oak was new and French, supplemented by 30% one year-old American oak barrels.

The maker of The Hedonist is Walter Clappis who owned the Ingoldby winery for 20 years during which time it had a pretty glorious record on the Australian show circuit. He claims to be the only winemaker from McLaren Vale to have won the famous Dan Murphy Trophy three times, and is a leading exponent of biodynamic viticulture – which can't have been that easy in McLaren Vale, I can't help thinking. Nowadays he is substantially helped by his winemaker daughter Kimberly.

According to winesearcher.com this wine is on sale in Australia for Aus\$18.35 a bottle. The UK importer is ABS Agencies (contact dftw@abswineagencies.co.uk) and in October 2008 (!) they at long last achieved a major listing: Waitrose, at £8.99.

One other thing impresses me about this screwcapped wine: there is such a shortage of decent wine names, with producers coming up with successively more ridiculous abstract nouns that it seems particularly clever to have nabbed a name as appealing as The Hedonist. Pig or no pig.

Much easier for British wine lovers to find, and made nearby, is **Willunga 100 Grenache 2005 McLaren Vale**, also aged in French oak and fully expressive of McLaren Vale's super-friendly, ripe fruit with the sweet juiciness of Grenache grapes. I think that is anything at £7.99 from Sainsbury's this wine, also 14.5% and also screwcapped, is underpriced. It should be in 178 Sainsbury's stores in the UK.

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