Landmark Australia ☐ Day 2

2 Jun 2009 by Julia Harding MW

See also Landmark Australia - Day 1

Before I say anything about Day 2, I should mention some of the wines we had with dinner last night. As well as filling our days with highly focused tastings, Wine Australia makes sure we slack not in the evening. The 'themed dinners' include some delicious food from the hotel's appropriately named restaurant Appellation – appropriately named since so much of this week is designed to promote the regional diversity of Australian wine – plus more exemplary (in the literal sense of the word) wines.

Multi-tasking is not my forte, so eating, tasting, writing notes at the same time as engaging in conversation is pretty demanding. However, it was well worth the effort given the wines in my glasses and the people I was sitting with: notably pre-eminent wine writer and owner of Coldstream Hills James Halliday and Tasmanian pioneer Andrew Pirie, as well as the other 11 tutorial participants who are turning out to be a great bunch with as wide a variety of perspectives as mother tongues.

Among the wines, the highlights were the three vintages of McWilliams Lovedale Semillon from the Hunter Valley (2007, 2003, 1998), which highlighted the unique in-bottle evolution of this variety from this region, and four wines Yarra Yering wines produced by the late Bailey Carrodus, a neighbour of James Halliday. My favourite of the four was the Yarra Yering Dry Red No 2 1980 Yarra Valley, a blend of Shiraz, Viognier and Marsanne, which had rich black fruit flavours, a hint of prunes even though it was not in the least overripe, a mouthwatering freshness and still several years to go.

Today, Tuesday, began after far too little sleep as the effects of jet lag continue – for some reason much worse than I normally experience. The first tasting was a terrific regional overview of Australian Riesling, led by Mr Riesling himself Jeff Grosset (pictured here).

We tasted the following wines (tasting notes to follow):

2007 Kilikanoon Mort's Reserve Riesling, Clare Valley

2005 Mount Horrocks Riesling, Clare Valley

1992 Petaluma Hanlin Hill Riesling, Clare Valley

1984 Grosset Polish Hill Riesling, Clare Valley

1973 Leo Buring DWC15 Riesling, Clare Valley

2002 Peter Lehmann Reserve Riesling, Eden Valley

1999 Pewsey Vale The Contours Riesling, Eden Valley

1980 Pewsey Vale Rhine Riesling Riesling, Eden Valley

2007 Seppelt Drumborg Riesling, Henty

1996 Crawford River Riesling, Henty

2007 Frankland Estate Isolation Ridge Vineyard Riesling, Frankland River, Great Southern

2003 Craigow Riesling, Tasmania

The Polish Hill 1984 was a real treat, with lightly developed toast and honey flavours combined with wonderful zest and freshness. Grosset discussed in great detail the influence of site on this variety, quoting Jancis with regard to Riesling's ability to transmit the character of a vineyard without losing its Riesling style [I'm flattered – JR]. He also pointed out the long history of Riesling in Australia, once the most widely planted white variety.

The second tasting of the day was a tour de force from winemaker Steve Pannell, one-time chief winemaker for Hardy's and now making his own wine in McLaren Vale [see my recommendation of his Willunga 100 in today's wine of the week - JR]. The purpose of the selection was twofold: to look at the distinct regional styles of Shiraz and to consider whether Shiraz blends were able to show the same regional patterns. (Pannell, incidentally is a huge fan of blending different varieties from the same region and there was strong support from the panel that blends were the future of Australia just as much as they are the touchstone of its past.)

The last four wines were tasted blind to see if the region was a more significant identifier than the varieties. We could identify the regions based on our tasting of the first 11. I found this hard because Pannell's own wine seemed to have cooler climate origins than McLaren Vale (he put that down to the big wooden fermenters) and the Wendouree was to me more recognisable by its tannin style than by its origin. I obviously need more practice. [But you stayed awake, Julia, which sounds a triumph in itself – JR]

1990 Craiglee Shiraz, Sunbury

1991 Plantagenet Shiraz, Mount Barker, Great Southern

1991 Henschke Mount Edelstone Shiraz, Eden Valley

1991 Wendouree Shiraz, Clare Valley

2006 Shaw + Smith Shiraz, Adelaide Hills

2006 De Bortoli Reserve Release Shiraz, Yarra Valley

2006 Giaconda Warner Vineyard Shiraz, Beechworth

2006 Mt Langi Ghiran Langi Shiraz, Grampians

2006 Seppelt Mt Ida Vineyard Shiraz, Heathcote

2006 Clarendon Hills Astralis Vineyard Shiraz (Syrah), McLaren Vale

2006 Charles Melton Grains of Paradise Shiraz, Barossa Valley

2006 Clonakilla Shiraz/Viognier, Canberra District

2006 SC Pannell Shiraz/Grenache, McLaren Vale

2006 Spinifex Indigene Shiraz/Mataro, Barossa Valley

2006 Wendouree Shiraz/Malbec, Clare Valley

The afternoon tasting, held at Barossa Valley Estates, and intended as 'An historic perspective' was led by wine

auctioneer Andrew Caillard MW, who has encyclopedic knowledge of the fine (and old) wine market in Australia. (He's probably most well-known for his Langton's Classification.) James Halliday had some great stories to tell about the older wines and his earlier tasting of them. And guess who turned up for the tasting, the lovely Mr Andrew Jefford, currently based in Adelaide, as he described recently in Jefford's drought.

This was a very special tasting since some of the wines barely exist today. Many of the oldest wines are virtually impossible to source and were made in only small volumes in the first place. The greatest treat of all was Penfolds' Bin 60A Cabernet/Shiraz 1962 (grapes from the Barossa Valley and Coonawarra). This wine, which some say is one of Australia's greatest ever, got my highest score and deepest admiration for the incredible depth of fruit that remained within a fine, poised structure of tannin and acidity. Too good (and rare) to spit. The Seppelt Great Western Hermitage K72 Shiraz 1954 Great Western, Grampians was also remarkable: although the nose was of a a very old wine – plenty of furniture polish, leather and tar – it was still perfectly proportioned on the palate.

The amazing line up of rarities and younger fine wines also included Grange 1955 and 1971, following on from the stunning Grange 2004 tasted blind in the morning:

1954 Seppelt Great Western Hermitage K72 Shiraz, Great Western, Grampians

1955 Penfolds Bin 95 Grange Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon, Multi-region South Australia

1955 Wynns Coonawarra Estate Michael Shiraz, Coonawarra

1962 Penfolds Bin 60A Cabernet Sauvignon/Shiraz, Coonawarra / (Kalimna) Barossa Valley

1971 Penfolds Grange Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon, Multi-region South Australia

1982 Wynns Coonawarra Estate John Riddoch Cabernet Sauvignon, Coonawarra

1985 Wendouree Shiraz, Clare Valley

1986 Henschke Hill of Grace Shiraz, Eden Valley

1986 Brokenwood Hermitage Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz, Hunter

1990 Mount Mary Vineyard Lilydale Cabernets Quintet, Yarra Valley

1995 Cullen Wines Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot, Margaret River

1996 Clarendon Hills Astralis Vineyard Shiraz (Syrah), McLaren Vale

1996 Penfolds Block 42 Kalimna Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Barossa Valley

1996 Best's Wines Thomson Family Great Western Shiraz, Great Western, Grampians

1998 Petaluma Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot

1999 Torbreck Run Rig Shiraz Viognier, Barossa Valley

2001 Bass Phillip Reserve Pinot Noir, South Gippsland

2001 Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier, Canberra District

2002 Seppelt St Peters Great Western Shiraz, Great Western, Grampians

2004 Balnaves of Coonawarra The Tally Cabernet Sauvignon

The planned trip to Seppeltsfield was cancelled to give everyone time to take a break before tonight's themed dinner (and give me time to write this!).

Tomorrow's menu comprises Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and blends, presented by Iain Riggs; Cabernet Sauvignon and blends, presented by Robert Mann and An alternative view with Louisa Rose and Max Allen.

[I think we would all understand if Julia failed to find time and energy to report on Day 3 - JR]

For all related articles and tasting notes, see Landmark Australia - a guide.