

Postcard from Sydney

6 Feb 2012 by Jancis Robinson

I took this hazy early-morning picture from our hotel room yesterday morning just before the [FEIRT two-day Rieslingfest](#). But what a great welcome Sydneysiders gave us on Saturday night. The fourth annual wine gala dinner organised by the indefatigable Australian chapter of Room to Read raised the record total of over AUD1 million for this admirable organisation that is so rapidly spreading literacy throughout the developing world.

It was in Asia that [Room to Read](#) began its programme of building schools and libraries with local communities and funding girls' scholarships (on the basis that a literate mother ensures that all her children are educated too), but their work is now spreading to southern Africa. Founder John Wood, on top auctioneering form on Saturday, told us that they are opening new outposts at a faster rate than McDonalds are opening in China. Impressive or what?

I'm sure the bids were as numerous and generous as they were thanks to the exceptional wines that were 100% donated for the evening. More than 300 of us were able to guzzle the just-released **Dom Pérignon 2003**, thanks to Moët Hennessy Asia Pacific. Gosh, that wine has taken on so much breadth since I first tasted it last August! I will add a new tasting note to our current tally of them, which I see stands at 64,829 at the time of writing. They also supplied the already toothsome **Cape Mentelle Cabernet Sauvignon 2008**, which proved why Margaret River stands head and shoulders above anywhere else in Australia for Cabernets with balance and real longevity.

Courtesy of some of Australia's finest and typically generous independent producers, the sort that Australian wine's future surely depends on, we compared two very different whites: **Cullen, Mangan Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2010 Margaret River**, a WA classic from Vanya C which is like no other wine style in the world (grassy and creamy at the same time with none of the oiliness of some dry white bordeaux), and **Yalumba Viognier 2010 Eden Valley** made by the Queen of Viognier Louisa Rose (one of the many Sydney show judges with whom we dined so well at Rockpool Grill last night).

A very fine **Yering Station Reserve Pinot Noir 2010 Yarra Valley** preceded the Cape Mentelle red and earned a special place in my heart as proof of the recovery of that resilient region from the [terrible fires](#) I witnessed at first hand, including at Yering Station, the year before.

Just before the auction we were treated to the classic botrytised Semillon **De Bortoli Noble One 2008** and afterwards had the best reward of all, the amazing 60+ year old **Campbells, Isabella Rare Topaque NV Rutherglen**. This last was my wine of the night, but then it did bask in the glow of AUD1 million raised from a roomful of generous Australians.

By the way, Australia is palpably less touched by what they all call the GFC (global financial crisis). Thanks to all the minerals they are selling to China, the Australian dollar is terrifyingly strong. We couldn't believe the prices (translated into puny pounds) when we looked at our first menu over Monday lunch, in Neil Perry's Chinese restaurant Spice Temple.

My jaw dropped further when I saw at the next table a young man and two women so casually order and drink a bottle of Dom Pérignon. Honestly, they drank it with no more ceremony than if it were a bottle of water - on a Monday lunchtime, in a Chinese restaurant, at the tail end of the summer holidays. Egged on, on my way out I asked them whether they were celebrating anything. 'No, George just likes his wine and food', was the response of the more loquacious of his guests. (I wouldn't have dreamt of doing this in London, by the way, but my best Sydneysider friend assured me that Australians wouldn't be offended by my curiosity.)