Chambers Rosewood Muscat NV Rutherglen

21 Dec 2012 by Jancis Robinson

From $10, €12.50, £10.95 and Aus$17 a half bottle

Find this wine

In the northern hemisphere, today is the shortest day of the year - possibly in more than one sense if the Mayan calendar prediction about today's bringing the end of the world proves true. The southern hemisphere on the other hand produces some of the finest, and certainly most distinctive, wines available to comfort us for the relative lack of warmth and sunlight we experience at this time of year.

From the northern hemisphere we have glorious ports, sherries, madeiras, vins doux naturels - and you can read about some of them in Richard's article on the rise of tawny port today and mine tomorrow, the last of my four Top 100+ selections concentrating on those that are strong and/or sweet. But there is one spot in the southern hemisphere that produces strong, sweet wines like no others, the little town of Rutherglen in north east Victoria.

Here a handful of largely family-run producers continue to curate (note correct usage) stocks of maturing fortified wines made from very late-picked Brown Muscat and Muscadelle grapes which they call respectively nowadays Rutherglen Muscat and Rutherglen Topaque. You can read more about these extraordinary wines, names and their makers in Rutherglen ambush and my tasting notes on what I was ambushed with in 50 Rutherglen stickies.

A very precise categorisation of the various ages and styles of these stickies has been introduced with the regular *Rutherglen* bottlings such as I am recommending here being the introductory style, average ing about five years old. One step up is *Classic* at around 10 years old, then comes *Grand*, more obviously oak aged at around 15 years, and then finally *Rare* wines that are more than 20 years old and can vary from sumptuous to being so concentrated they are almost painful to taste. I sometimes think the greatest categroy is Grand, such as the Chambers example I reported on recently in Wallowing in the finest strong and sweet.

Chambers produces some of the quirkiest, less predictable, arguably least civilised examples of these extraordinary wines. They are also, usefully, some of the easiest to find in both the UK (where winesearcher.com lists no fewer than a dozen stockists) and, especially, US where it almost looks as though every wine store in the land offers this wine. Note that it is more expensive in Australia than on export markets, which include Belgium according to winesearcher.com.

When I tasted **Chambers Rosewood Muscat NV Rutherglen** in Australia last February it was the most recently bottled blend and I am pretty sure this will be the one in current circulation (though see my complaint about unidentified bottlings of non vintage wines here).

It was the most beautiful pale rosy tawny. Like several Chambers wines, it seemed to have a trace of old oak on the nose but this was rather like a grace note rather than a major fault. The wine, like all these Rutherglen stickies, is extremely sweet and thick - fermented Christmas pudding? This is a wine, even at five years old, that has exceptional and distinctive personality and manages to be both sticky and dry on the end. I thought it tastes more complex than a regular five year old blend and wondered whether in fact it wouldn't qualify for the next level up, a Classic bottling. I certainly think it is great value and ta great ambassador for one of Australia's relatively few distinctively Australian wine styles.

Sip it slowly, having served it very lightly chilled perhaps - or serve it at room temperature with cheese, nuts, or instead of Christmas pudding.

I do hope the world doesn't end before you are able to take advantage of this recommendation.

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