

Sumptuous

Barossan Burgundy

Deferring to the French? Not likely! Descendants of the Barossa Valley's German settlers would be up in arms, and rightly so. Of Australia's 60 odd officially sanctioned wine regions, there's daylight between the rich Barossan wine culture and the rest. It's a strong sentiment, not easily matched, generations thick.

The character of the region is uniquely its own; the food, the people and, of course, the wines are all deeply anchored in their home soil.

With so much of the spotlight beamed down on the Barossa's superb Shiraz, it's easy to overlook arguably the most unique wines of the region – the blended reds made with Grenache, Shiraz and Mataro (a.k.a. Mourvèdre). They're not the most heroic, darkest coloured or most expensive wines, but they are a rare commodity indeed. For whilst Shiraz is grown in almost every Australian wine region, and certainly carries off an incredible array of different styles with relative ease, these GSM blends are much more scarce. In Australian terms, McLaren Vale is the only other torch holder of consequence.

The GSM blend works something like this: Grenache provides the fragrance, red fruits and charm; Shiraz brings darker fruit characters and flesh for the middle palate; Mataro anchors them with sturdy tannins and savoury, earthy bottom notes. They all sit neatly beside each other, complementary characters that fit together like a jigsaw. Complexity comes from the different constituent grape varieties, so these wines don't need to rely on oak for support. They're soulful and engaging.

When considering a great Barossa red, it's worth going beyond Shiraz. Senior wine writer Nick Stock makes a case for the Barossa's unique blended reds

Underneath it all

Despite all the many and varied possibilities of style, regional character shines strongest through them all; they taste like the Barossa first and foremost. Different facets may peek out from the blend from time to time and house styles continue to evolve from vintage to vintage but their Barossan roots run deepest of all.

The resource of old vines that belongs to the Barossa means there are steady, reliable feet beneath the best bottles: as both Grenache and Mataro were star performers in the bygone era of fortified wine production, the GSM is their legacy.

Vine age appears to contribute more significantly to these GSM blends than for most other reds. It brings deceptive power that's deeply bedded in, as well as an effortless, innate sense of balance.

But it's the value question that's most convincingly answered by these wines. They frequently excel at price points well below the equivalent quality for varietal Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. There's a wealth of great red coming from the Barossa these days and, pound for pound, there's no better value than the unassuming GSM. It's a direct line to the soul of the region.

**Nick Stock is author of the
*Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide***

Top pickings



2006 Kaesler Stonehorse Grenache Shiraz Mataro

Superb value, with dense dark plum fruits, some blackberry and deeper brooding fruit aromas, a little earth and tar. Takes something from each variety, terrific balance. \$19



2006 Spinifex Esprit

Mataro, Grenache and Shiraz in almost equal parts with a spoonful of Cinsault for good measure. Deep, ripe black and blue fruits, smells rich and concentrated. Confident tannin drive. \$28



2006 Hewitson Miss Harry Grenache Shiraz Mourvèdre

This affordable modern take on the Barossa blend has plenty of brash primary fruit and is custom-made for drinking young. Beautifully assembled. \$22

Beyond Shiraz

The Barossa's unique reds

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