

# A taste of Barossa

January 29 - February 4, 2010

The Independent Weekly

25

www.independentweekly.com.au

Sixty Barossa wines were put to the taste test.

Philip White <http://drinkster.blogspot.com/>

**B**arossa staged a tasting last week that history will regard as more profound than most attendees will realise.

Sixty wines were served blind in eight groups, according to their geology. A similar event was held at Seppeltsfield a year ago, but to garner support from the region's constituents, that nervy exploratory fixture was held mainly for famous wine critics from around the world, some of whom got the point.

The winemakers who observed last year's event, but didn't participate, have had 12 months to ponder. We tasted shiraz wines from 2008, from older, neutral barrels. This year it was 2009's, to establish the foundations of a database which will – after further decades of tasting – suggest descriptors unique to each vague sub-region.

Twelve tasters, including twitchy industrialists, ticked four pages of boxes for each wine, covering its spectrum of flavours, aromas, styles and strengths. This will be compiled statistically, isolating words that re-occur frequently for future use in describing each zone's characteristics. In spite of vintage variation, my responses almost identically matched last year's.

The first set came from the higher vineyards between Williamstown and Lyndoch, and a few from the older country over the Para around Gomersal. These are largely in alluvial sands laid down in the last million years or so, overlying the micaceous schists, siltstones, calcilicites and quartzites of the Upper Burra group, all older than 540 million years. These were perfumed and fragrant delicacies with hints of fennel, aniseed and wintergreen over their elegant cherries and dark berries. They were generally of moderate alcohol and acidity; concentrated, yet modest and pretty, reminding me of the floral cuties from the schist of northern Beaujolais.

Next, the western piedmont of the Barossa range, from Rowland Flat north through Bethany and

Vine Vale, along the Stockwell fault to Saltram. Most of this is sediment of sand, gravel and clay, younger than 1.8 million years. These, too, were perfumed, elegant wines, musky, juicy and delicate over their cherries and blackcurrants. Fleshy rather than mineral, with meaty charcuterie hints.

The bracket from north of there, in similar geology, from Nuriootpa past The Willows and Light Pass, was quite different, with a touch more acidity and alcohol, and classic Barossa chocolate adding to their rich fruitcake and leather. In these ethereal, juicy, wines, dried apple, an aroma typical to the more westerly vineyards, began to emerge. Some showed the minty influence of eucalypts.

Across the range, the wines of the High Barossa – from McLean's Farm aton Mengler's Hill, south

past Mountadam to Eden Springs and east to Craneford – rocked. This geology – metasilstones, metasandstones, slates, gneisses and granites – is 490 to 545 million years old, when sluggy critters, arthropods and trilobites were evolving. With stony mineral basenotes perfectly reflecting their source, these were stacked with marello cherries, blackberry jam and prunes, in ethereal, juicy, bouquets; below lay charcuterie meats and earth. The alcohols seemed modest, as did the acidity, but the latter looked natural, which always beats shovelled tartaric!

The wines from north of Eden Valley town, out past the Henschkes, were more boisterous, minerally and stony, with blackcurrants, blackberries, dark cherries, prunes and sinblack jams abundant. Milk chocolate appeared

here, and more charcuterie; even metwurst. The tannins were earthy, yet sinewy.

Back to the Moppa: the flats north of Nuriootpa, where the great old vines of Ebenezer and Kalimna somehow live in dry alluvial sands deposited 1.8 to 50 million years ago, with bits of more recent wind-blown sand on top. These were what I'd call classic, mighty, fruitcake Barossa: black and thick with prunes, cherries, mulberries and cassis, with dark chocolate, and meaty, leathery tones glowering below, and higher alcohols to match. The tannins were soft, yet earthy and mineral.

South then, and west to Greenock, Seppeltsfield and Marananga, and the Valley's strongest, most complex wines: packed with jams and fruitcake, prunes and figs, dried apple and pear, leather, cooking chocolate, and walnuts. The rocks north of the Marananga Church to the by-pass highway are schists, siltstones and quartzites from the Upper Burra Group, from way back in the Neoproterozoic (545-1200 million years), when multi-cellular life was beginning.

Climate and altitude aside, this is where I dream that the older, more complex rocks give flavours to match.

And so to Stonewell: the ironstone south from Marananga to Tanunda. Some of these wines smell like a blacksmith's shop, with hot coke burning below horseshoes glowing on anvils. You'll find aniseed, walnut, fig and leathery aromas here, with much of the Greenock character, contrasting in a more elegant, creamy structure, somewhat akin to chocolate crême caramel, towards the softer custardy textures of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

While the winemakers who entered wines in this event were brave, showing unfinished produce to so many fussy spots, I bow to them, very, very deeply. They will be remembered. Too many others failed to attend the next day's event, when everything was on display. They'll slip off the man

