



South Australia Trip Visiting Winemaker – University of Adelaide

It was a moment when, for once, I was completely lost for words. I was reading an email inviting me to spend three weeks as Visiting Winemaker for 2013 to the University Of Adelaide (UA), under the ‘Walter, Carew and Richard Reynel Fellowship’ programme. It was a real honour to be invited to be a part of such a prestigious programme. I was following in the footsteps of some highly regarded wine makers; Bertus Fourie, then of Diemersfontein ZA, John Forrest of Forrest Estates NZ and many others since the 1970’s.

My role over the three weeks was to be both lecturer and mentor to the under- and post-graduate students, applying my knowledge and experience to assist with winemaking issues whilst they student were undertaking the white wine fermentation unit. My task as lecturer was to educate the students regarding quality and management issues, packaging and ‘commercial’ winemaking, important areas that can be overlooked by Oenology students due to a sometimes narrow focus on practical aspects of the subject.

I must admit, my knowledge of Australian wine was fairly limited in terms of understanding its regional identities, a subject that over recent years the Australian wine board has been keen to publicise and promote. I was really looking forward to understanding the differences between the various areas around Adelaide, and to learn more about the individual producers and how they are collaborating to raise the profiles of their unique *terroirs*.

University of Adelaide

My first impressions of the University were cold and wet as winter weather had really set in. But upon warming up and absorbing my new surroundings, it became clear how much investment Australia has ploughed into wine and agriculture research, and into creating probably one of the best Oenology teaching facilities in the World. Formerly the Roseworthy Wine College before moving to the Waite Campus under the UA, the winery building still bears its prestigious roots of the Roseworthy name badge. The small-scale winery holds everything that an oenology student requires; various presses, closed and open fermenters, a large number of temperature controlled rooms (including barrel storage) and fully equipped laboratories. To accompany this winery, the campus also boasts approximately 2.5ha of vineyards for training and research. Located just next to the winery building, and world- renowned for its research excellence, is the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI). It really is no surprise that Australia is leading the way in wine science research and development.



Most of my days were spent on the University campus, assisting students and preparing various lectures and tastings. In my free time (and on grounds of good behaviour), I was able to explore the local wine sub-regions of the Adelaide Hills, McLaren Vale and the Barossa at my leisure. What astounded me was that, within a comparatively short distance (+1hr) in either direction, the variation in style and flavour profile between the sub-regions was so apparent. Of course, the topography and geology play a major role, but the climate also varies dramatically between these areas. From influential coastal breezes and varying elevations in areas reaching 45°C by day, the grapes still manage to retain pure varietal characteristics. If I was to write about every wine I tasted this article would never end, so I have condensed my three week experience into bite-size pieces and selected the best from a very good bunch!

Adelaide Hills

When the sun finally shone I realised that I was visiting the region at the right time of the year. The beautiful rolling hills were a vibrant green and the vines were standing proudly in their rows, waiting to commence their duties. The Adelaide Hills stretch along the eastern side of Adelaide from McLaren Vale in the South to The Barossa in the North. Essentially, they act as the shield that prevents coastal rainfall (1400 - 1000mm per annum) from reaching the more arid Riverland (262 mm). This becomes suddenly apparent as you cross the Hills from West to East, as trees become more randomly spread out and the flat plain towards the Riverland shifts from green to brown. The elevation of the vines is mostly between 300 - 500m with Mount Lofty's summit being the highest point at 710m.

My first call was at Hahndorf Hill Winery, just outside the small, picturesque, Germanic themed town of Hahndorf. A very pleasant cellar door displays their range of rather obscure varietals from the Hills, and their famous Choco Vino experience (yes, wine tasting with chocolate!). Over the past decade they have been pioneers of the Austrian varietal Grüner Veltliner (or Grü) in the Hills and are now on a mission to establish the Adelaide Hills as the home of Australian Grü. Sadly, due to its popularity, I was too late for the 2012 vintage (2,000 x75cl) and the 2013 was only to be bottled 6 weeks after I was there. However, I was able to sample some of their other exciting Austrian varietals, Blaufrankisch red and Zweigelt rosé. Over all, I was impressed with the purity and expression of fruit in these wines especially from South Australia and on a cold wet day when I visited; it was clear that such varietals are suited to this cooler wetter meso-climate.



I then made the short trip to Petaluma, Bridgewater Mill, a stunning old water mill, with the biggest water wheel I have ever seen! Here I tasted the full cellar door range, both still and sparkling. For me, the viognier was their shining star. I am a fan of viognier, but new world Viognier? I am yet to be convinced. However, this was a very classy expression of the varietal, not at all unbalanced, alcoholic or viscous (as it can sometimes be).

On Another afternoon, I made the trip back into Hahndorf to visit the cellar door of Somerled Wines, a small yet quality-focused producer. Here, I was impressed with virtually every one of the wines in their range, but the straight Sauvignon Blanc 2013 just blew my little socks off! Passion fruit and mango hit me face-on, leaping from the glass.

In addition, they also produce a ‘fumé’ style Sauvignon Blanc which was the one and only example of this style I came across during my visit. Perfectly balanced, full malo-lactic gave beautiful body to complement the light oak ferment and add a richness and depth to the palate. At only 11.7% ABV it seemed the perfect wine but only in limited supply - just two barrels worth, a cellar-door-only wine.



As probably one of the larger producers of the Hills, the cellar door of Shaw and Smith was a little intimidating in its modernistic appearance, but then again their vision is one of refinement and uniqueness which is reflected in the architecture. The S+S M3 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were the outstanding wines from their concise range, capturing the purity of varietal fruit. A delicate and structured use of oak resulted in complex, fruit driven and balanced wines, both with potential for further development over 3 – 5 years.



Finally my travels in the Hills ended at Deviation Road, a small winery tucked away off the main wine route whose focus recently has been on sparkling wines. Having sampled two wines in their sparkling range, I can agree. The rosé sparkling was a pretty blush colour, and displayed a beautiful red berry and rose nose, fine bubbles and a complex finish.

Summarising my visit to the Hills, I believe its strengths lie in creating outstanding quality Sauvignon Blanc and sparkling wines. The cooler climate and higher elevations assist in capturing the true characters of varietal fruit and in retaining a minerality that's perfectly suited to sparkling wines. This for me is a region to keep a close eye on. Quantity is low, but quality it sky-high, and the unity of purpose displayed by the producers in capturing purity with minimal intervention is placing the Adelaide Hills firmly on the map.

