

South Australia: Part 1 – Slow Burn

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This first part of my two-part annual South Australia report generally covers the northern half of this vast region, focusing mainly on the regions of Clare Valley, Barossa Valley, Eden Valley and Adelaide Hills.

This report includes just over 200 tasting notes mainly from wineries that are actively selling internationally. These largely fall into one of three categories: 1) those coming from well-established 30+ year-old wineries that, like their ancient vines, have the quality foundations to weather the vagaries of difficult times (think Henschke, Yalumba, Jim Barry, Elderton, etc.); 2) the 10- to 30-year-old wineries that survived the storm by being not just a cut above the rest, but several cuts above the rest (e.g. Torbreck, John Duval, Glaetzer, and Hentley Farm); and 3) a precious few newcomers that have managed to get overseas representation, because they are seriously impressive (e.g. Powell & Son and Sons of Eden).

While the Australia category in major markets around the world seems to be holding its own right now, malingerer consumer apathy has resulted in a slow burn for many, many South Australia producers in particular who just can't seem to catch a break. And yet the secrets of the survivors' and seemingly lucky newcomers' successes in the international wine sales scene couldn't be more plain. In a rapidly evolving wine market - where wine faults and vintage-related ripeness/concentration issues are, for the most part, things of the past, it is not good enough to make good or very good wine anymore. Perhaps it goes without saying that the international buyer doesn't want to fork out \$20+ for anything less than outstanding from South Australia. But what's adding fuel to this slow burn is the dawning realization that intrinsic quality is only half the bottle, er battle. Post the days of critter labels and sunshine in a glass, South Australia wine consumers are now also seeking that intangible interest factor that can only be evoked by a wine's embodiment of very special places and/or people. In the glass, that equates to a unique signature. And therein lies the rub.

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," would, I think, be an apt (borrowed) opening line to the story about South Australia's heydays of the early noughties. The good times spawned an ethos of winemaking and business mindset that has been hard and in some cases impossible for South Australia producers to escape. The silver lining for consumers is that even though the international shelves are stocked with a lot less South Australia wines, the choices are greater and a lot more exciting. Enjoy!



d'ARENBERG

89 pts d'Arenberg The Dry Dam Riesling 2015

The 2015 The Dry Dam Riesling offers a pretty, floral laced nose with notes of honeysuckle and lime blossoms with white peaches and lemon curd at the core. Off-dry and light-bodied on the palate, it achieves lovely balance and intensity with a long, lively finish.

88 pts d'Arenberg The Broken Fishplate Sauvignon Blanc 2015

The 2015 The Broken Fishplate Sauvignon Blanc offers a textbook nose of gooseberries, grass and elderflower with a bell pepper undercurrent. Medium-bodied with a suggestion of satiny texture and great uncomplicated intensity, it is a lip-smacking winner for this variety for Australia!

JOHN DUVAL

98+ pts John Duval Eligo Shiraz 2013

Very deep purple-black in color, the 2013 Eligo has an intoxicating nose of creme de cassis, blueberry tart and violets with underlying menthol, cloves, fenugreek, licorice and dark chocolate hints. The medium to full-bodied palate is youthfully restrained, with taut, muscular blackberry and exotic spice flavors supported by fine-grained, firm tannins and lively acid, finishing with excellent length. This is a very classy 2013 Shiraz!

93 pts John Duval Plexus Shiraz Grenache Mourvedre 2013

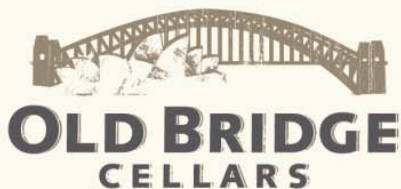
Medium to deep garnet in color, the 2013 Plexus (a Shiraz, Grenache, Mourvèdre blend) gives slowly evolving raspberry tart, kirsch, potpourri and garrigue notes with underlying spice box and incense hints. Medium to full-bodied, the palate is velveteen textured with layers of expressive red fruits preserves and exotic spice flavors, finishing very long.

92+ pts John Duval Entity Shiraz 2013

Deep garnet-purple colored, the 2013 Entity Shiraz is profoundly scented of crushed blackberries and wild blueberries with star anise, chocolate box, menthol and violets in the background. The ripe, seductive, medium to full-bodied palate is still quite youthful but open for business with velvety tannins and a lively lift to the long pepper and black berry laced finish.

92+ pts John Duval Plexus Shiraz Grenache Mourvedre 2014

Medium garnet-purple colored, the 2014 Plexus (a Shiraz, Grenache, Mourvèdre blend) is a little youthfully reticent, offering glimpses at black raspberry and mulberry aromas plus licorice, cracked black pepper, earth and lavender. Medium to full-bodied and still very primary in the mouth, it has a great intensity of red and black fruit flavors supported by ripe, rounded tannins and just enough freshness, finishing long and spicy.



92 pts John Duval Entity Shiraz 2014

Deep garnet-purple colored, the 2014 Entity Shiraz reveals crushed blackberries and blackcurrants on the nose with hints of dried Provence herbs, garrigue, eucalypt and black pepper. Medium to full-bodied, the palate delivered mouth-filling black fruits and peppery flavors with chewy tannins and a lively backbone, finishing with a spicy lift.

89 pts John Duval Plexus Marsanne Roussanne Viognier 2015

The 2015 Plexus Blanc has notes of apricots, poached pears and allspice with hints of honeysuckle and white pepper. Medium-bodied, there is a pleasant touch of oiliness to the texture with a great concentration of fruit, finishing with lingering anise and baking spice notes.

KILIKANOON

92+ pts Kilikanoon Mort's Reserve Riesling 2015

The 2015 Riesling Mort's Reserve has a youthful, fresh and vibrant nose of lime juice, green mango and grapefruit peel with a waft of acacia honey. Dry, light-bodied and with a wicked backbone of crisp acidity, it delivers a refreshing citrus burst with some mineral layers and a steely finish.

90+ pts Kilikanoon Exodus Shiraz 2014

Deep garnet-purple colored, the 2014 Exodus Shiraz has a somewhat closed-down, reduced / rubbery nose to begin, opening out with some air to reveal a blueberry, black plum and dried mulberries scented nose with licorice, coal and cloves hints. Full-bodied, taut and finely grained in the mouth, it has a lively backbone cutting through the rich, densely packed flavors and it finishes with a pepper and herb lift.

90 pts Kilikanoon Mort's Block Riesling 2015

More open-knit than the Mort's Reserve, the 2015 Riesling Mort's Block delivers white peach, lime blossom and apple notes plus a hint of coriander seed. The dry, light-bodied palate is relatively approachable with plenty of zesty flavor on offer and good length.

88 pts Kilikanoon Kavel's Flock Shiraz 2014

Deep garnet-purple colored, the 2014 Kavel's Flock Shiraz offers earthy / savory notes of moss covered bark, damp earth, yeast extract and underbrush with a warm blackberry and aniseed core. Medium-bodied with soft, ripe tannins a lively acid backbone supporting the earth and black fruit flavors, it finishes with pleasant mineral notes.



88 pts Kilikanoon Killerman's Run Cabernet Sauvignon 2014

Medium to deep garnet-purple in color, the 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Killerman's Run has a pronounced blackcurrant, eucalypt and blueberry laced nose with hints of pencil lead and dried Mediterranean herbs. Medium-bodied, soft, lively and fruit in the mouth, it delivers plenty of uncomplicated menthol laced black fruit flavors and good length.

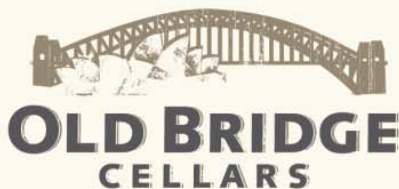
88 pts Kilikanoon Killerman's Run Riesling 2015

The 2015 Killerman's Run Riesling sports zingy lemon peel and yuzu zest notes with touches of white pepper and dill seed. The dry, light-bodied palate offers a lot of expressive flavor at this youthful stage with lively but approachable acidity and good length.

85 pts Kilikanoon Lackey Shiraz 2013

Deep garnet-purple colored, the 2013 The Lackey Shiraz has notes of ripe blackberries, stewed plums and spice box. Medium-bodied, soft, uncomplicated and ready for business, it is a spicy red for everyday drinking.





Australia: Victoria & Tasmania

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Here are a few notes on recent releases from Australia. Enjoy!

CHAMBERS

99 pts **Chambers Rare Muscat**

Tasted again in March 2016, the NV Rare Muscat has a deep brown color with a distinctive green tinge to the rim. The nose is, in a word, incredible and terribly difficult to describe, which is a great thing. Rancio doesn't begin to capture the complex, oxidative signature: honey coated walnuts, molasses, dates, sandalwood, baking spices, old chesterfields, aniseed and potpourri with fleeting, ethereal wafts of incense, roasted nut and exotic spice notes. Rich, unctuous and gratuitously multi-layered, this is one for the hedonists.

GIANT STEPS

92+ pts **Giant Steps Tarraford Vineyard Chardonnay 2014**

The 2014 Tarraford Vineyard Chardonnay has a citrusy, chalk dust and struck flint laced nose with a peach blossom and lime leaf undercurrent. The medium-bodied palate is tight-knit with buckets of tension supporting the intense citrus and stone flavors, finishing with great length.

90 pts **Giant Steps Yarra Valley Chardonnay 2015**

The 2015 Chardonnay opens with a wet pebble, peach and pear scented nose with hints of baking bread and honeysuckle. Light-bodied with a silkiness to the texture and just enough fruit intensity, it gives a lively acid backbone and long mineral finish.

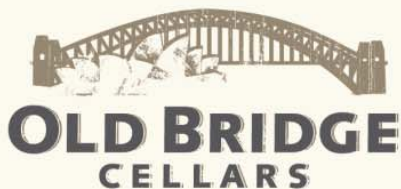
INNOCENT BYSTANDER

88 pts **Innocent Bystander Pinot Gris 2015**

The 2015 Pinot Gris displays perfumed notes of jasmine, lychees, honeydew melons and acacia honey with a waft of anise. Medium-bodied with a nice touch of oiliness to the texture, it gives plenty of youthful fruit and a spicy finish.

86 pts **Innocent Bystander Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2015**

Laced with lashings of fresh grass, green apple, lime juice and pea pod notes, the 2015 Sauvignon Blanc is light-bodied, spritely and bone dry with plenty of zestiness to the finish.



YERINGBERG

95 pts Yeringberg Chardonnay 2014

The 2014 Chardonnay has a complex, savory and spice laced nose with notes of baker's yeast, cashews, marmite and allspice over a core of apricots, pink grapefruit and lemongrass. The palate has wonderful layers of toast, nut, stone fruit and spice flavors packed in an elegant medium-bodied package with a creamy texture and layers of mineral flavors lingering Long into the finish. In a word, yum.

91+ pts Yeringberg Cabernet Blend 2013

Medium garnet-purple colored, the 2013 Proprietary Red has a classic nose of red and black currants, black berries, plums and pencil shavings with a waft of bay leaves. Light to medium-bodied, the palate is elegant and finely structured, with beautifully ripe tannins and a great intensity of red and black berries, finishing long with a gentle herbal lift.

90 pts Yeringberg Marsanne Roussanne 2014

The 2014 Marsanne / Roussanne has honeyed pear, apricot and fresh hay aromas with hints of baking bread and nutmeg. The palate has a beautiful satiny texture and loads of youthful Apple, pear and peach flavors going yeasty / spicy in the finish.

90 pts Yeringberg Viognier 2014

The 2014 Viognier has a profoundly scented nose of lychees, spiced pears, baked peaches and rose water. The palate has a lovely oily texture with a lively acid backbone to balance and tons of perfumed tropical fruit and spice flavors lingering Long into the finish.