

{ down under }

Guests savor the flavors of South Australia in Austin.

South Australia Comes On Strong



James March, CEO of the Barossa Grape & Wine Association, shared a depth of knowledge for the distinctive characteristics of the Barossa Valley and Eden Valley.



Jennifer Lynch, General Manager of McLaren Vale Grape Wine & Tourism Association, shared anecdotes with attendees of the many advantages of seeing this unique wine region as a dynamic tourist destination.

SAVORING ADELAIDE IN AUSTIN

by Jessica Dupuy / photos by Kirk Weddle

IN EARLY MARCH, THE U.S. WELCOMED A SPECIAL VISIT FROM A FEW WINE ambassadors out of Adelaide, the heralded wine capital of Australia. Located in the country's state of South Australia, Adelaide is home to 18 distinct wine regions with a dynamic and longstanding history of growing outstanding wines—about 80 percent of the premium wines in all of Australia are produced within an hour of Adelaide.

In an effort to broaden American palates to the nuances this wine region has to offer, trade organization Wine Australia hosted a multi-city seminar exploring the old vines, classic wines and family lines of regions such as Barossa and McLaren Vale. The whirlwind American tour included a stop in San Francisco, as well as three major wine markets in Texas: Austin, Houston and Dallas. Led by Australian Wine Educator Mark Davidson plus special guests James March, CEO of the Barossa Grape & Wine Association, Jennifer Lynch, General Manager of McLaren Vale Grape Wine & Tourism Association, and Australian wine educator Chuck Hayward, the first stop on the tour was in Austin. Considering the wide range of options this specialized panel could have made, concentrating their efforts in Texas seemed a deliberate target.

"I've been selling Australian wines throughout the United States and they consistently sell well in Texas. Consumers here love and appreciate the bold flavors for Australia and that appreciation seems to be growing," says Hayward. "It's as if they've adopted it as a New World Bordeaux."

During the set up for the tasting, it was clear attendees would experience examples of some serious Australian wines—all from South Australia.

"This particular state is home to a multitude of great regions that have all manner of regionally expressive wines," said Mark Davidson. "Economically it is the most important state for wine production in Australia with just under 50 percent of the annual production of Australian wine.

But it's also historically important as it is home to some of the most established regions in Australia—Barossa, McLaren Vale, Clare Valley—and has the largest plantings of old vines anywhere in the world. Barossa alone was settled in 1842 by German immigrants.

"That's really where we made our start. We were a community united by the vine early on," said James March. "We have a wonderful tradition of European heritage that really defines what we're all about."

The state can attribute much of that distinction to the lack of phylloxera in its regions. While much of Europe's historic plantings were ripped up in the late 1800s, South Australia's vines were left unharmed. As a result, the state has imposed strict regulations on plant material coming within its borders.

The panel guided guests through an in-depth tasting of 12 classic wines by specific wine region, from historic vines and historic families alike including:

Henschke 2015 Julius Riesling, Eden Valley

Coriole 2010 The Optimist Chenin Blanc, McLaren Vale

Cirillo Estate 2010 1850 Grenache, Barossa Valley

Yangarra 2013 High Sands Grenache, McLaren Vale

Kaesler 2012 Avignon GSM, Barossa Valley

D'Arenberg 2009 Ironstone Pressings GSM, McLaren Vale

Penfolds 2012 St. Henri, South Australia

Kay Bros 2011 Block 6 Shiraz 2011, McLaren Vale

Langmeil 2013 Freedom 1843 Shiraz, Barossa Valley

Torbreck 2012 Run Rig 2012, Barossa Valley

Hewitson 2010 Old Garden Mourvèdre 2010, Barossa Valley

Wirra Wirra 2012 Dead Ringer Cabernet Sauvignon, McLaren Vale

And while guests weren't physically able to experience the geography of South Australia, the panel made their best effort of showcasing some of the area's most distinctive elements that impact overall wine production. One of those key elements is the geology.

"This part of the continent is one of most geologically diverse regions in the world," said Davidson. "Early on, they undertook a comprehensive process of mapping the region to understand the variances the geology would bring. While it's true that Australia fits in the new world in terms of wine, if we're talking geology, it's Old World. Older than Europe. This combined with the Mediterranean climate and the ranges that protect the inland air flow, influences and shape the wines and styles."

Many of these elements were revealed in the glass. The weathered rock steeliness of the Henschke Riesling, with a balance of candied lime zest, tropical flowers and a certain salinity, offered a distinct sense of place from what March referred to as the royal family of Eden Valley wine. The 2010 Cirillo Estate 1850 Grenache was a revelation of just how remarkable old-vine Grenache can be.

"Grenache is one of the most under-appreciated varietals on the planet in its adaptability and approachability," said Davidson. "It's like Pinot Noir on steroids, with great, voluptuous fruit up front with a sense of elegance and structure as well."

March added, "The best old vine material is found in South Australia, but is rarely observed. This 1850 example is a classic Barossa Grenache. These soils are almost Burgundian with delicacy."

As the tasting progressed, attendees experienced a progression through classic Barossa Valley Shiraz, Mourvèdres, and old-vine McLaren Vale Cabernet Sauvignon. It was an introduction to a part of Australian wine that is only now finding its way to the American market: wines with balance, finesse and structured fruit, whispering their age and maturity in a glass.

"This is what South Australia is all about," said Chuck Hayward. "We have oversold the idea that South Australian wine is predominantly about big style. But there are a lot of cooler-climate areas, and you're dealing with wines that are food-friendly and work well around the table."

Following the seminar, guests were encouraged to enjoy a walk-around tasting



Jay Weatherill, Premier of South Australia, engaging with attendees of the Savor Adelaide over the deeply layered flavors found throughout the coastal state.



Well-regarded Australian wine educator Chuck Hayward brought an American perspective to the beauty of South Australia's quality wine regions.

with more than 100 other South Australian wines. In attendance was the Premier of South Australia, Jay Weatherill. With a role equivalent to that of a governor in the United States, Weatherill joined the experience as an ambassador for the many flavors of South Australia—from lamb and beef to wheat, barley and seafood. But wine is just as much a priority for him as well. "We're a region that benefits from all things from the land, air and sea. We believe in the integrity of our natural resources, and the history of our regions throughout the past couple of centuries has stood the test of time," said Weatherill. "But what the wine industry also represents for us is the importance of community along with innovation."

Weatherill's hope is to invite people to look again at this part of Australia and find a way to connect with the many stories behind its authentic flavor—wine included. Jennifer Lynch echoed his sentiments. With a particular focus on wine and tourism for McLaren Vale, Lynch's enthusiasm for this quick U.S. tour was motivated by her desire to reshape misconceptions the American consumers might have about Australian wine in general by pointing them to regions such as McLaren Vale. "We want to reset the impressions people may have had early on about Australia," said Lynch. "If we can reveal the authentic flavors of South Australia, we could evolve into a wine region that's visited and enjoyed as much as Napa." SJ