



Dan Berger's Vintage Experiences

The Weekly Wine Commentary

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JOHN DUVAL

A wine, food, and travel writer this afternoon told me she was sad that, except for a few high-end items, many of Australia's top wines are no longer being imported to the United States.

The fact is, some of the best wines in Australia are still here, but some are not as visible as they once were when the Aussie wine boom was on.

Among the top wines is a brand that has been well under the radar in the last decade, and now is nearly a decade old in this country. They are the wines from the former chief wine maker for Penfolds, the man who made Grange, wine maker John Duval.

After 29 years at Penfolds, Duval did his 40th harvest this year and just released four startlingly fine wines that display the Barossa in its best light.

Yes, Barossa, but the label doesn't have the often accompanying "valley."

That's because there are two ways to use the term. Without the word "valley," the name indicates use of fruit from the cool Eden Valley, which is contained in the Barossa, but which is at a quarter of a mile altitude and has a decidedly cool-climate feel.

Duval is not dismissive of some of the huge and powerful Australian reds that once dominated U.S. wine collectors' cellars, with loads of oak and alcohol. But he'd rather make a more structured wine. These four examples (see Tasting Notes) are not just brilliant examples of balance, but with charming flavors and solid fruit.

The key to all three red wines is that they all have what I consider to be near-perfect structure with honed tannins, good balance of oak, and a pH level of roughly 3.5(!).



The lead wine in the brace is fairly expensive, but is made to emulate Grange, and since the 2008 Grange now sells here for between \$600 and \$700 a bottle, Duval's price is a good value—if you can use such a term.

2012 John Duval Plexus (white Rhône blend), The Barossa, "Plexus"

One of the best white Rhône's I've tasted in years with aromatics from 11% Eden Valley Viognier, cool-climate stone fruit aromas, and a faint hint of oak. Great with southern cooking! *Exceptional*

2012 John Duval Shiraz, The Barossa, "Entity"

Inclusion of 33% Eden Valley fruit gives this stylish and blueberry-leather scented wine terrific depth and potential. Has the trappings of Barossa Valley with a cool-climate influence. *Exceptional*

2012 John Duval GSM (red), The Barossa, "Plexus"

Dramatic aroma of blackberry, pomegranate jam, and a sandalwood note. Perfect pitch—a wine that makes a strong case for the best Shiraz-Grenache-Mourvedre blend you'll ever taste. Better after two hours of air. *Exceptional*

2010 John Duval Shiraz, The Barossa, "Eligo"

Rich and dark, but with subtle earthy nuances and powerful mid-palate fruit and textural perfection with grainy tannins and just enough new oak. Only 500 cases produced. *Exceptional*