

## 10 Things Every Wine Lover Should Know About d'Arenberg

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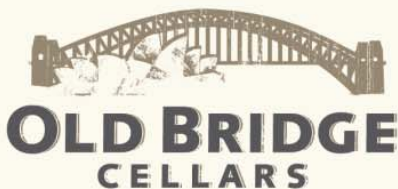
### 1. One of a kind

It's easy to spot winemaker Chester Osborn in a crowd. He's the one with tousled, curly strawberry-blond hair wearing an outlandish, often psychedelic-colored shirt. And if he is hosting a wine tasting, there'll be the usual array of kooky props and stuffed toys used to explain the incredible history of d'Arenberg – like the rubber severed arm, sleeve intact, for a story about his top Shiraz, Dead Arm. He has madcap props for all 55 wines



– seriously – and they travel with him on work trips. But don't be fooled by Chester's eccentric behavior. He's an astute operator, a sensitive, talented producer – he just has loads of personality and energy to burn.

Chester is a fourth-generation winemaker with a respect and affinity for [McLaren Vale](#) and the vineyards his family has owned since 1912, as well as those bought more recently. He's been at the helm since 1984. Although officially retired, his affable dad, affectionately known as d'Arry, is never far away from the winery. After all, he created d'Arenberg, even if his son propelled it onto the international wine stage.



## **2. From fortifieds to prestige bottles**

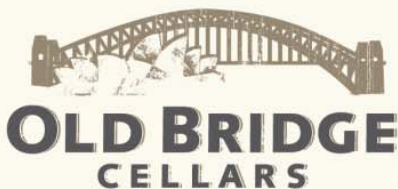
From the 1930s to the late '50s the fledgling [Australian](#) wine business centered on fortified and bulk wines, destined largely for the English market. All that changed in 1959, when d'Arry decided to focus on bottled wine. He thought it appropriate to call the new wine d'Arenberg after his mother's maiden name – she died giving birth to d'Arry in 1926. And the distinctive red stripe adorning every label was actually inspired by the eye-catching blue one on what was once known as Houghton White Burgundy (which was actually Chenin Blanc) but d'Arry preferred the color red. He remembered the red stripe on his old school tie and thought, that'll work. And it did. All the labels have had a revamp of late but the distinct red stripe remains a constant.

## **3. Wines, wines and more wines**

D'Arenberg must be a marketing nightmare. There might be 55 different labels, but there are 64 wines in the portfolio – with more to come. "It drives me crazy," says d'Arenberg's Australian brand manager, Tash Stoodley. "Chester is a mad-hatter but the American market adores him and his idiosyncrasies as he is the person who brings the brand to life. You can't change Chester. He's always creating and when he comes to me and says 'hey Tash, I have a great idea for a wine', I just walk out!"

## **4. Hall of Fame**

D'Arenberg earned a spot in the leading American magazine Wine & Spirits' Top 100 Wineries of the Year at the end of last year. One of just five Australian wineries to be inducted into the magazine's annual Hall of Fame and the only one from McLaren Vale. Three disparate wines – and price points – featured, yet all scored 93: the 2011 [Shipsters' Rapture Single Vineyard Shiraz](#), the 2010 [Derelict Vineyard Grenache](#),



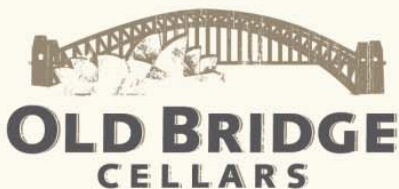
and the 2011 [Custodian Grenache](#). "We tend to focus on rare, premium wines but wineries can deliver great wines at all price points," Chester says. "Pride in your craft doesn't disintegrate just because a wine sells for \$18 or less. If it has the d'Arenberg name on it, I make sure it says something about our style of winemaking and I am proud of it."

### **5. Dead Arm, the flagship red**

Thankfully, no one has lost an arm pruning at d'Arenberg. Dead arm is the common name of *Eutypa lata*, a serious fungal disease causing vine dieback. The fungus attacks one half – or the arm – of a vine, eventually killing it, leaving dead wood; the irony is that the remaining arm can produce low-yielding bunches of fruit with highly concentrated flavors. It sums up the powerful, structured and full-bodied Dead Arm Shiraz. The inaugural Dead Arm, released in 1993, included some Cabernet Sauvignon but, since '94, it has been 100-percent Shiraz. "The Dead Arm is respected in Australia and internationally and it would have to be my biggest and greatest achievement to date, apart from my daughters," says Chester.

### **6. What's in a name?**

What do the Cenophilic Cat, the Piceous Lodestar, the Vociferate Dipsomaniac, The Blind Tiger and the Noble Botryotinia Fuckeliana have in common? They are some of the irreverent names Chester has created for his wines – almost as colorful as his shirts. While dyslexic, he has a brilliant mind and penchant for unusual – if pertinent – words to weave a story about what's in the bottle. Take the Blind Tiger, for example. "The vineyard was planted in 1926," explains Chester, "right in the middle of the American Prohibition era and the name is slang for a speakeasy, a place selling illegal grog. A Blind Tiger. It just fits with the wine. Although the real mouthful is Noble Botryotinia



Fuckeliana – it's one of my sweet styles and delicious."

He discovered the quirky phrase is actually a synonym for noble rot, or *Botrytis cinerea*, named after 19th-century German botanist and mycologist, Karl Wilhelm Gottlieb Leopold Fuckel. Where does Chester find such inspiration? "On the toilet. Every morning I look through the dictionary. Or I read some weird scientific paper. I eventually find wacky words that fit perfectly to a wine."

## **7. Amazing sites**

On a more serious note, Chester has toyed with the idea of producing single-site wines to express the diversity of McLaren Vale's ancient geology. His Amazing Sites project began in earnest with the release of a dozen 2010 wines, comprising three Grenaches and 9 Shiraz bottlings. With the current 2012s, the number of Shirazes has grown to 15 and there are two more from 2013. There's a distinct McLaren Vale theme but all are different. "From the age of eight, I used to eat grapes from the various vineyards and I could taste the difference. It was obvious to me then." The Amazing Site wines are barrel selections sourced only from estate fruit, from vines between 20 and 120 years old, and the Shirazes are all components of Dead Arm.

## **8. Old vines and geology**

McLaren Vale is home to some of the oldest Shiraz, Grenache and Mourvedre, some heading well past a century, but geology also interests Chester. The region was officially mapped out for vignerons in 2010, indicating geology created the greatest diversity. The Geology of McLaren Vale Wine Region map identified seven geological terranes (sic), which produce different characters in the wines, says Chester. For example, the Amazing Site Shiraz called The Other Side comes off a vineyard planted in 1916. "It has a



geology based on limestone called the Blanche Point Formation, which is around 25 to 50 million years old. The wine is always strong and reeks of earthy almost peaty characters," he says, "and the tannins are imposing. Yet I am pleasantly surprised how beautiful the wine grows in time with its peppery, licorice and chocolate notes. It accentuates the earthy, irony character in Dead Arm." Such geological inputs are fascinating – visit [www.mclarenvale.info/wine/the-geology/](http://www.mclarenvale.info/wine/the-geology/) for more information.

## **9. Family ties**

For the Osborns' centenary celebration in 2012, Chester produced a non-vintage sparkling blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier with fruit sourced from the cool-climate region of the Adelaide Hills. He cheekily called it DADD, a tribute to his forefathers but, a year later, Mumm was none-too-pleased. Global drinks giant, Pernod Ricard which owns Champagne house G.H. Mumm with its distinct red stripe, persuasively told the Osborns to stop using the name. Chester cheerfully agreed to phase it out by 2015 and he's on the cusp of relaunching DADD as mum. Well it's now named in honor of his mother, Pauline or rather her nickname, Polly. DADD's new moniker is Pollyanna Polly.

## **10. D'Arenberg's cube**

For a decade now, Chester has imagined a state-of-the-art building in the middle of a vineyard comprising a tasting room, cellar door, function center for 190 people and a 45-seat restaurant. His vision is being realized. Resembling a Rubik's cube but without the colors, construction has begun on the five-story building with its pulled-out sides, all white and glass with mirrors at the bottom to give the impression it is hovering over the vines. The cube is expected to cost \$8.4 million and will be finished in late 2016.