

## Take Note: Real Australian Wine Is Here

July 17, 2017  
By Nick Stock



Australia is no longer emerging. Australia is no longer a “one to watch.” Australia is here, and it stands tall among the world’s greatest wine nations. After all, it’s home to the oldest dirt on the planet, as well as a vast reserve of the world’s oldest vines. These vines are tended and their grapes carefully harvested and transformed by some of the most scientifically advanced, most youthfully capable, intelligent, widely-tasted and well-traveled winemakers anywhere.

Indeed, real Australian wine is a world away from cheap, commodity wine and overcooked caricatures. Yes, those happy-go-lucky supermarket wines and the odd fruit bombs are still to be found—just as they are in California, Tuscany, Bordeaux, Spain, Champagne and wherever else great wine has carved its path—but they are *not* the story of today nor that of the future.

I recently holed up with the JamesSuckling.com team at the refurbished Crafers Hotel in the Adelaide Hills to taste more than 600 wines. With the late and cool 2017 harvest just put to bed and winter’s hand descending on these cool rolling hills, there could be no better place to explore Australia’s current offerings.

Our tasting focused firstly on wines that are well represented in the major markets closest to Australia, in particular China, Japan and Thailand as well those producers staunchly committed to the US. And as the week progressed, the branches of curiosity reached into the cellars of compelling local producers, and we sought out others from further afield whose wines needed to be tasted on the basis of sheer quality alone.



Wines by Lucy Margaux Vineyards. The handmade sauvignon blanc is like a top growth dry white from Bordeaux.

During the tasting, it became clear that Australia has the best of several worlds on offer. The climatic diversity across a geologically ancient geographic mass whose footprint is similar to that of all North America creates a wealth of difference. These two factors combine to create a vast web of stylistic possibilities. Talking about Australia is like talking about Europe. The two are wine continents, not wine regions!



Then you have this overlay of time and cultural layers. There's a first wave of classical regions whose story traces an unbroken line from the mid-18th century. There's a layer of new classics like Margaret River established in the late 1960's and the Yarra Valley, whose Renaissance moment kicked off at a similar time. Wine then traverses more recent paths through places like the Adelaide Hills and Tumberumba, the first pages of their new and exciting stories only just being turned.

The face of Australia's best wine is today shaped by a newly harnessed confidence. Confidence in the home dirt, in refined and thoughtfully applied techniques, intelligent and caring farming practices and in the collective capability of those who walk the vines and work the cellars. But, perhaps most important of all, there is a confidence that the world beyond its shores can recognise the true context of the best Australian wines. This is no easy ability to master because for so long the message of Australian wine has been fragmented, oversimplified, distorted and concocted.

The heart and soul remains shiraz. So many shiraz are now as refined and polished as the best of the Northern Rhone Valley. Just about every wine region of Australia makes top class shiraz, but we always have a soft spot for Barossa Valley and producers like Head, Henschke, Penfolds, Sami-Odi, Spinifex, and Torbreck.

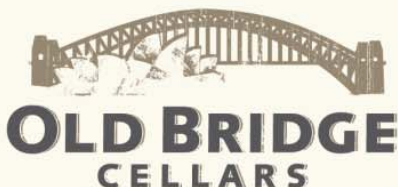
Barossa is also ground zero for the majority of great rieslings. The dry rieslings of Eden Valley can compete with the best of Rheinpfalz, Alsace and the Wachau. And don't overlook Grenache from Barossa!

Chardonnay seems to work just about everywhere, and we're happy to see a countrywide focus on restraint. We like this Burgundy-inspired energy in the wines and love the complexity and intensity the best wines are getting. Carefully selected cabernet sauvignon-based reds are also exciting, and it's the best of the Margaret River that is on the case. Don't miss current vintages from classic names such as Vasse Felix, Cape Mentelle, Leeuwin Estate, and Moss Wood.

We love the vibe and focus of pinot noir and lighter reds like gamay. The Adelaide Hills is making some of the most energetic at the moment. Many of the wines are also natural wines or from organic or biodynamically grown grapes, which adds to their interest. "I just want to make wines that reflect my vineyards here in the Adelaide Hills, and I want to make the wine myself with no one else in the cellar," says Taras Ochota, the owner of the large-garage wine of Ochota Barrels. His handcrafted reds and whites are some of the most sought after in the natural wine world, made with brilliant clarity and character.

It's characters like Taras who are pushing the boundaries of Australian winemaking and interpreting their soils and microclimates with the creativity of free-spirited musicians. We equally enjoyed tasting the wines of Lucy Margaux Vineyards, a neighbor of Ochota Barrels. The handmade sauvignon blanc is like a top growth dry white from Bordeaux. "Some people think that making natural wines is easy because you don't have to do anything," said Anton Van Klopper, the owner and winemaker of Lucy Margaux Vineyards. "But you have to be even more precise and always searching for means to combat the issues with spoilage and oxidation."





Precision and vision seems to be riotous in Australia at the moment. It doesn't matter if someone is making a classic shiraz in the Barossa or a unsulfured, natural wine in the Adelaide Hills. The quality, the energy, the excitement—it's all there. And it's why we're headed back to Australia in early December to taste more.

### **LEEWIN ESTATE**

#### **97 pts Leeuwin Estate Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2012**

This is a linear and beautiful wine as always with currant, floral, mint and wet earth. Graphite. Rust. Metal shavings. Full body, chewy and tight with reserve and intensity. A truly excellent wine. Just a baby. Screw cap. Give it another three years. But love now.

#### **96 pts Leeuwin Estate Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2013**

Aromas of black licorice, black berry and rust. Hot stone. Full body, layered and juicy with loads of fresh fruit and chewy tannins. Sexy, muscular cabernet with tone and focus. Screw cap. Hard not to drink now. Better in 2022 but gorgeous now.

#### **95 pts Leeuwin Estate Art Series Chardonnay 2014**

Aromas of cooked apple, pineapple and pear with hints of honeysuckle. Full body, fantastic depth of fruit and intensity. Tight and muscular. Reserved. Powerful. Screw cap. Give it a year or two still but a joy to taste.

#### **94 pts Leeuwin Estate Art Series Shiraz 2014**

Lots of blackberry, blueberry and crush white pepper aromas that follow through to a beautiful palate of quartz, mineral and Indian spice. Full body. Tangy and bright acidity. Intense fruit. Yet always reserved.

#### **93 pts Leeuwin Estate Art Series Riesling 2016**

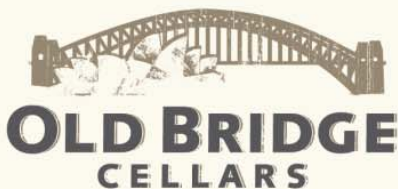
This is a long time favorite for Australian riesling with stone, flint and spice character. Lemon, lime. Medium to full body, fruity and crisp. A beauty as always. Fresh. Super peppermint at finish. Screw cap. Drink now or hold.

#### **93 pts Leeuwin Estate Art Series Sauvignon Blanc 2016**

This is a dense sauvignon with lime, green mango, and stone. Full body, layered and rich. Fresh and savory. 35% barrel fermented in used wood.

#### **92 pts Leeuwin Estate Prelude Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon 2013**

This is layered and rich with currant, berry and walnut shell character. Full body, chewy tannins and a juicy finish. Love it now but it will age wonderfully.



**91 pts Leeuwin Estate Siblings Shiraz 2015**

A juicy and fruity shiraz with blackberry, black pepper, and hints of citrus. Full to medium body, light tannins and a fruity finish. A lively finish. Edgy.

**90 pts Leeuwin Estate Siblings Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2016**

A flinty and lively white with sliced green apple, grapefruit and lime character. Medium body, dense fruit and a fresh finish. 60% sauvignon and 40% semillon.

**90 pts Leeuwin Estate Prelude Vineyards Chardonnay 2016**

Lots of ripe apple and pineapple character on the nose and palate. Full body, layered and rich. Tangy acidity. A juicy and fruity chardonnay. No malo.

**d'ARENBERG**

**94 pts d'Arenberg The Ironstone Pressings GSM 2014**

Extremely perfumed and bright with berry and spice aromas that follow through to a full body, firm and chewy tannins and a flavorful finish. Shows lots of punch and structure. Give it two or three years to soften. Blend of 72% grenache, 25% shiraz and 3% mourvèdre.

**93 pts d'Arenberg The Coppermine Road Cabernet Sauvignon 2014**

Lots of currant, chocolate, coffee and blackberry aromas. Full body, round and velvety tannins and a flavorful finish. Juicy. Chewy and impressive. Better in 2018.

**93 pts d'Arenberg The Footbolt Shiraz 2014**

Aromas of blackberry and blueberry with walnut, dark chocolate and cigar box. Full body, round and juicy. Lovely savory finish. Love the intensity and structure to this. Drink in 2019.

**92 pts d'Arenberg The High Trellis Cabernet Sauvignon 2013**

Very ripe with currant and coffee aromas that follow through to a full body, lightly chewy tannins and a flavorful finish. Remains tight and focused. Needs two or three years to soften.

**92 pts d'Arenberg The Dead Arm Shiraz 2014**

A chewy and rich red with tannic and berry character. Dark chocolate and walnut undertones. Medium to full body, bright acidity and a clean and flavorful finish. Drink now but better in 2019 for the tannins to resolve.

**91 pts d'Arenberg The Laughing Magpie Shiraz Viognier 2012**

This has a dose of viognier that adds a sheen of sweet-smelling stone fruits across more typical tarry aromas and blackberry shiraz fruits. The palate's smoothly rendered with dark plum, chocolate and licorice fruit flavors. Plush and approachable. Blend of 93% shiraz and 7% viognier.



**91 pts d'Arenberg d'Array's Original 2014**

Aromas of blueberry, violet and stone follow through to a full body, firm and silky tannins and a flavorful finish. Drink in 2018.

**89 pts d'Arenberg The Money Spider 2016**

Gently glossy yellow fruits and honey and hints of butterscotch. This has a medium-weight palate and a tangy acid finish.

**88 pts d'Arenberg The Galvo Garage 2013**

Dense and dark-fruited. Ripe, concentrated. Ultra-firm extract. Drink now. Blend of 66% cabernet sauvignon, 19% petit verdot and 15% merlot.

**87 pts d'Arenberg The Hermit Crab Marsanne Viognier 2016**

The nose shows lots of bruised apples while the palate's slightly overdone and lacking some freshness. Drink now.

**KILIKANOON**

**94 pts Kilikanoon Attunga 1865 Shiraz 2012**

Haunting depth to this wine. Ethereal, mixed berry fruit aromas on the nose with a wealth of plum fruit compote and blackberry as well as fresh leather and sweet baking spices. Tannins are richly played. Drinking well now and easily through to 2030.

**92 pts Kilikanoon Oracle Shiraz 2012**

A wine of real substance and dept. Ripe blackberry fruit and oak is nicely played. Tannins are smoothly layered in sheet-like style. Drink now to 2025.

**92 pts Kilikanoon Prodigal Grenache 2013**

Red berries follow through to darker fruits. There's a lot to like on the palate. Really openhearted and open-knit. The structure is there to support the fruit. Drink now to 2022.

**90 pts Kilikanoon Killerman's Run Riesling 2016**

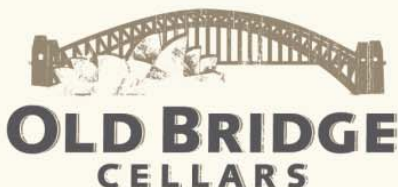
A rich and approachable style with apple and lime and gentle spice aromas. The palate has sweetly ripe lime and apple fruit. Plenty to offer.

**90 pts Kilikanoon Covenant Shiraz 2014**

This has some really plump, rich and alluring fruit with dried plum and biscuit spices on the nose. The palate's really fleshy and juicy. Sheet-like tannins, and a bold flavor-filled finish.

**89 pts Kilikanoon Killerman's Run Cabernet Sauvignon 2015**

Seriously ripe cabernet fruit with cassis and blackcurrant dominating more subtle leafy nuances and gently toasty oak. The structure is right on the mark. Cabernet flows wide and tannins gather at the finish. Riper style here.



**89 pts Kilikanoon Blocks Road Cabernet Sauvignon 2014**

Rich and layered black cherry, cassis and plum fruit aromas on the nose. The palate's nicely cut with sinewy tannins that thread through classic cassis and dark cherry fruits. Tannins finish ripe and soft.

**88 pts Kilikanoon Mort's Block Riesling 2015**

Petrol. Sliced apple, pear and licorice. Medium body. Simple.

**88 pts Kilikanoon Killerman's Run Shiraz 2015**

Bathed in rich plum fruits with subtle spice surrounding a central core that's all pervasive on the palate. Smooth and very, very ripe. Drink now.

**88 pts Kilikanoon Killerman's Run GSM 2015**

Blend of grenache, shiraz and mataro. Attractive grenache fruits sit across ripe dark fruits. There's a thread of reliable grainy tannins that floats up through the finish. A little spicy burst to close it out. Drink now.

**GIANT STEPS**

**94 pts Giant Steps Primavera Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016**

A full and juicy wine with dried strawberry, lemon rind and light-cedar character. Full body, chewy tannins and a flavorful finish. Needs time to soften but all here. Will be better in 2019.

**93 pts Giant Steps Applejack Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016**

Beautiful flavors and aromas of strawberries, lemon rind, tea leaves and cedar. Full body, silky tannins and a lively acidity on the finish. Pretty now, but better in 2019.

**92 pts Giant Steps Sexton Vineyard Chardonnay 2016**

This shows lots of freshly cut green apples, flint, gunpowder and a hint of smokiness. The palate's full, fruit-forward and very delicious. Mineral finish. Drink now.

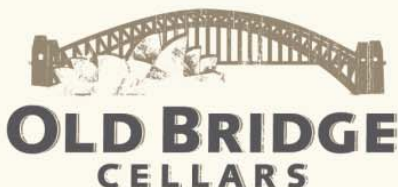
**91 pts Giant Steps Lusatia Park Vineyard Chardonnay 2015**

The nose is quite fruit-forward with apples, persimmon, white flowers and light apricots. The body is full and very tangy and delicious. Fresh acidity and an almond-like finish.

**CULLEN**

**93 pts Cullen Diana Madeline 2015**

Lovely sweet-tobacco, forest-flower and currant aromas. Full body and chewy, juicy tannins that turn savory and delicious. Blend of 87% cabernet sauvignon, 11% merlot, 1% merlot, 1% cabernet franc. Drink or hold. From biodynamically grown grapes.



**93 pts Cullen Ephraim Clarke SSB 2015**

Cooked apple, stone and lanolin aromas and flavors. Dense and fruity. Full body, intense fruit. Long and flavorful finish. Green mango and gun metal qualities are fascinating.

**92 pts Cullen Mangan East Block 2015**

This is very rich on the nose with blackberry, mushroom and dried flower character. Full body, juicy fruit, chewy tannins and a flavorful finish. Blend of 80% malbec and 20% petit verdot and made from biodynamically-grown grapes. This needs a year or two to soften.

**JOHN DUVAL**

**93 pts John Duval Entity Shiraz 2015**

The nose is all blackberry and dark plums with background cola, earth and baking spices. The palate has density with the right hand of balance to guide it in. Drinking well, now to 2025+.

**93 pts John Duval Eligo Shiraz 2014**

A very intense ripe blackberry core of fruit and a big, ripe tannin frame. Heads into tarry territory on the palate, holds long with thicker weight tannins. Plum essence to close. Drink now to 2025.

**92 pts John Duval Plexus MRV 2016**

A fresh and lively white with sliced lemon and pear character. Full body, bright acidity and a stone and licorice undertone. Drink now.

**91 pts John Duval Plexus SGM 2015**

A flavorful red with lots of juicy-fruit and chocolate character. Full body, round and juicy tannins and a savory finish. Drink now.

**90 pts John Duval Annexus Grenache 2015**

A big and juicy grenache that has lots of full-throttle fruit yet still remains fresh and edgy. Old school and a little overdone but may have its followers.