

The Expressionist Series Wines

When I arrived at Gibbston Valley some 2 years ago, I was floored by the vineyards. Not so much from the spectacular views each of them afforded (though they ARE spectacular), but the diversity of sites that Gibbston Valley sourced fruit from. Bendigo, the first port of call for me that day, is the prime example. Within Bendigo, a single sub region remember, we have six different vineyards, each of them having its own unique soil type, aspect and microclimate – each possessing a unique terroir.

You can imagine that made me salivate – after all the difference between making wine and any other beverage is that in the winemaking world we actually care about the genesis of flavour – that is, why a unique flavour or style emerges from a particular plot of land.

Then, following a short trip through the Gorge, I saw the Home Block. Planted in Gibbston 25 years ago, this creation of Alan Brady's is the earth mother of Gibbston Valley Wines. Whilst it is a small vineyard with no special views, its beauty lies somewhere else – rows of gnarled thick trunks lined up in almost complaining twisted compliance. These are old vines.

Two things then: dramatically diverse vineyards in Bendigo, and old vines here in Gibbston. It has been my considerable pleasure to be able to craft wines from such diverse stock. The Expressionist Series seeks to showcase and celebrate that diversity.

How then are they unique?

Firstly they are different in intent from our larger scale wines. One of the fundamental absolutes for me as a winemaker is the concept of balance – where each constituent of a wine is sculpted so that one does not dominate the other. Herein we construct nuances and complexities of flavour – giving voice to many but dominance to few. This is a ruling mantra for me in Gibbston Valley wines. With the Expressionist Series wines, balance is not the ruling mantra – expression is. Vivid clarity of whatever defining feature the vineyard lends that fruit becomes the focus.

In that way, it follows that they will differ in style. Perhaps the name "Expressionist Series" will illuminate that. (Bear with me here!). The goals of Expressionism as an artistic aesthetic were not to reproduce the impression suggested by the surrounding world (i.e. realism, impressionism), but to very strongly impose the artist's own sensibility. Here, the search for harmony and balance became secondary to the achievement of obtaining the highest expression. Using distortion and exaggeration through vivid, jarring, violent and dynamic images, the artist presents a twisted form of reality for heightened emotional effect. It was the converse of rationalist and classicizing tendencies. Think Egon Schiele, think Wassily Kandinski, think *The Scream*....

The beauty is that we can pick and choose aspects from that: we do not want to make a wine version of *The Scream*, for instance. We do wish to avoid aspects of expressionism that antagonise. But where today there is so much centralisation of style, not only in wine but everything, the joy becomes to rummage in the fringes, where difference occurs and is celebrated. So where the wines become Expressionist is in their resistance to mass market homogenisation, centralisation and rationalisation of style. Instead of aiming for balance, these wines will be the most vivid portrayal of the vineyard's inner self (terroir) in a heightened way that

stimulates an emotional effect (intoxication does not count). The wines are not made so much with the intention to please, but the intention to move.

Let me give examples of how that worked in practice. Le Maitre Pinot Noir, the product of the Home Block, is a wine drastically different from any other Pinot Noir we have made over the last decade. The essential nature of the vineyard, its terroir, makes the wine lighter in colour than all of our other blocks. The aromas are different – so much spice and earth. The roots have dug in deeper – the flavours are unique, almost as if you are tasting the essence of the soil, and the tannin structure, well it is to me like the dry craggy skin of a wizened veteran, an “old soul” as they say. Rustic.

A unique product - and yet centralising tendencies would be to get more colour in the wine, get more primary fruit, soften the tannins with fining, and smooth over the wine with lashings of new oak. That is, unless you wish to blend it away. Since 1998, that has been that wine's fate.

Winemaking for the Expressionist Series takes on new ideals and new joys however. Light in colour? Good, it's Pinot Noir, it can be, don't argue with the vines. Nose so different from the dark plum norm? Well even better, let's preserve those at all cost. Only 20% new oak. Do not blend. Do not filter. Do not cold stabilise. Tannins rustic? A defining feature of the vineyard, leave them there – and a good reason to have a very fine cut of beef. Essentially I don't care if tartrates form, if a crust occurs, if you don't think this wine will get 95 in an oak loving magazine. I just want to revel in the magnificence that comes from a unique terroir – give me some beef with it, and afterwards I might just finish with a cigar.

The Gris. Such a textural wine. Beautiful vineyard, beautiful fruit. How to accentuate the vivid possibilities of mouthfeel and texture? Hand pick, whole bunch press. Ferment in small stainless barrels. No, not oak, stainless steel. NO tannins, even old oak imparts tannins. Barrels are perfectly shaped to give maximum contact between the creamy yeast lees and the wine, far more than stainless steel tanks. Warm ferment, not the traditional cool. Bring the texture out yet more, make this wine fat. Leave plenty of sweetness, plenty of alcohol, plenty of flavour, it all gets swallowed up into one great gorgeous mouthful.

So magnified difference for artistic, emotive effect is the aim of the Expressionist Series. It embraces Terroir and single vineyard aesthetics, and wraps them in an interpretative artistic shawl that should by their very difference create wines that provoke and amuse, that should give pleasure and rise to contemplation and discussion (indignation is fine).

The wines are all named, and are as follows.

Le Fou: The Madman or the crazy one but also the genius – this word is often used to describe a brilliant but anti conformist scientist. What other variety suits this but Riesling?

La Dulcinee: Old fashioned word used for the loved woman, mostly used in poetry. It expresses tenderness (i.e. sweetheart in English), but also passion and elegance. Pinot Gris....

Le Maitre: The Master. Here the Master is melded – the man that planted the vines with the wine that came from the vines that the man planted.... The sum of the life passion of Alan Brady,

from the vines he planted 25 years ago, on the 20th anniversary of the first ever Gibbston Valley Pinot Noir.

This series is designed deliberately with an artistic ethos because they are joyous creations with personalities of their own; and they are meant most of all, like art, to be enjoyed. They are more than just dirt and stones, photosynthesis, and fermentation – they are evolving living wines that want to stir you into one state or another.

Enjoy