



WINE REVIEWS

Words and photo by Krystina Menegazzo

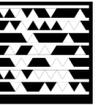


ABOUT KRISTINA MENEGAZZO

La Donna del Vino is the pseudonym of this young lady from Melbourne who completed her winemaking degree whilst being a gypsy working in vintages throughout Australia and Italy. Finally she decided to return home and sell wine instead. In her spare time she cooks, eats, drinks buon vino and is a self-confessed Neb Head (someone really into Nebbiolo).

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HODDLES CREEK ESTATE Pinot Blanc 2010

Upper Yarra Valley, Victoria. RRP \$35

If there is one thing I have learned about Hoddles Creek Estate wines, it's that you better snap up their bargains when you get the chance. After working the grape harvest there back in 2006, I realised there was, and still is, a fair amount of hype about their wines. Why? Perhaps it is because they offer the best in value for their Victorian Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. However even their Pinot Blanc, a newer addition planted in 1997 with its first vintage only in 2008, already has a loyal following. Hence I made sure to snap up a six-pack as soon as it went on sale in March last year. The great thing about six-packs or dozens is that with patience, you get to witness a wine's evolution. This may be somewhat askew, but I could not help but think of Hans Christian Andersen's beautiful story, 'The Ugly Duckling' [1844], as a way of describing the development this wine has been displaying.

Upon receiving my delivery, I ripped open the box to find six youthful, slender bottles gazing up at me. My babies. The first night and I had already cracked the seal on my first 'duckling'. It had only been hatched from its tank into bottle a few weeks earlier so was dulled from the shock of this process. As a result, it had a prickly, unkempt feather texture that stood out against the food. Not ugly in the least, but in need of a little time to build structure into its wings.

Some months later I brought my next 'duckling' over to a friend's place for dinner. This time, the bottle's contents were calmed and the wine eager to please. The palate had lost the awkward spiking sensation and instead displayed feathers that were soft, dry, and gently brushing the mid-palate with white nectarine and subtle wintersweet flavours.

Only last week, I arrived at what I thought was the third 'duckling' and as the story goes, discovered that I had actually brought forth a beautiful swan. Wings assertively spread wide, with delicate white florals and white peach aromas proudly enveloping its drinker, its mature feathers finally swathed through the mouth like silk. Good things do come to those who wait.

CRISTO DI CAMPOBELLO Grillo 'Laluci' 2010

Sicily, Italy. RRP \$30

I closed my eyes, lifted the glass of crystalline Grillo wine to my lips and heaved a deep sigh. There I was, sunbathing on a foldout chair surrendering myself to the warm Mediterranean sun on the southwest coast of Sicily. A handsome, young Italian waiter had sashayed over after noticing that I had been fanning myself. "Would la signora like a glass of Sicilian Grillo?" he

asked, gazing down at me with his warm brown eyes. He held a bottle of the Cristo di Campobello 'Laluci' Grillo. Perching himself by my side, he began pouring the wine into a glass when... I woke up. I was back in Melbourne.

What a gem of a story that could have been if it were true. I bought the wine from a wine store. But fear not! The thrill of this wine lies in its capacity to offer the classic grillo grape vibrancy to that gaping hole between the ears. This Grillo holds a tight line with its lemony acidity and more citron-like bite, but this quality means it extends a generous, mouthwatering element at the same time. This juicy palate completes a picture postcard summer day seated in, say, a flowering courtyard, or if you're really lucky, with a gorgeous Sicilian by the beach, with its acacia florals and orange blossom honey nuances. I'll work on the latter for next time.

QUERCIABELLA Chianti Classico 2008

Tuscany, Italy. RRP \$30

There is something to be said for the winemaking craft and how to obtain that coveted balance, especially in not so desirable vintage conditions. In some areas, the 2008 Tuscan vintage falls under that category with the bout of summer drought. I'm not sure what the team at Querciabella did that year to cope, whether it be their low harvest yields, organic/biodynamic vineyards or blending expertise of predominantly Sangiovese with 5% Cabernet Sauvignon, but they did it expertly.

The syncing of the various components in wine had me harking back to family summer days by the beach. I would tread the sand towards the water, smile on my face, hair whipped back in the wind. Once I was knee-deep in, out of the corner of my duck-like peripheral vision, I would suddenly detect my two dear brothers five metres away on either side, bracing themselves with fistfuls of wet sand. It was a combination of their timing, direction, determination and my lack of agility that allowed them to get me every time. Querciabella's combination has worked here too. This is a redolent wine expressing a delightful bouquet of black forest fruits, nutmeg and raspberry vincotto. This Chianti has structure, but is not dominated by its use of oak. Instead there is a beautiful balance here with black cherry and plum fruits, ground coffee beans against a thread of vincotto, finished by a characteristic gentleness that good quality Chianti brings when placed in the right hands. These days, I no longer fear being bombarded with wet sand, but I too no longer fear for the future of good quality Chianti – especially when there are producers like Querciabella, or even Castello di Ama, Poggerino and Isole e Olena, who are making their distinctive and beautiful mark on the Tuscan landscape.