



PHI

LUSATIA PARK VINEYARD
Chardonnay

YARRA VALLEY
2008

Bartoli

Shelmerdine



WINE REVIEWS

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ABOUT KRYSTINA 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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PHI Chardonnay 2008

Yarra Valley, Victoria. RRP \$46.00

Dear Patrick Hernandez,

You may have a really distinct (and admittedly annoying) way of saying the word 'born', but it turns out that your lyrics to the famous 'Born to be alive' song rang true as I drank this wine.

Phi was born from the love of two families, the De Bortolis and Shelmerdines, who wished to capture the spirit and elegance of the Lusatia Park vineyard site in the cool hills of the upper Yarra Valley.

The meticulously kept vines have yielded grapes that require little interference once they make their way to the winery. Basically, the result is a wine that is 'alive'. Alive in the sense that I have had the wine in my glass for over three hours and it is still breathing, opening up, and each time I go back for another look, I find myself smiling that something so simple can give me so much pleasure. Yes, this is the power of wine and one which keeps us wine nerds around the world delving deeper to discover its true mystique.

Starting off quite tightly wound, the Phi Chardonnay eventually begins to unravel with threads of lemon and verbena before unfurling itself further with more luscious white nectarine notes and an array of meadow flowers. Opulent in all the right places, the mid-palate is full with a restrained buttery character that could never dominate because of the concise acidity in its fruit.

A pleasure to drink and one of the few Yarra Valley Chardonnays that demonstrate its unparalleled focus; a focus almost as powerful as a Patrick Hernandez stare.

GAIA Assyrtiko 'Wild Ferment' 2010

Santorini Island, Greece. RRP \$39.00

Greece is one big contradiction. They have beautiful landscapes, crystal blue seas and an archaeologist's dream of history. Yet they also have that wee slight problem of an unstable economy. 'Tis a shame because if there is one agricultural aspect that could help in some small way to bring more positive attention back into the Greek headlines, it could be this native humble white grape. It is called Assyrtiko [Ah-Seer-Tee-Ko] and in this case is grown on the picturesque setting of Santorini island. Been there? Gloat all you want. I have not, but my elder sister has flashed enviable photos to me of her basking on the edge of her hotel pool in Santorini, the islands and Mediterranean Sea as her backdrop. Whatever. I'll distract myself now by talking about the wine.

This is the latest in a new direction for the GAIA estate, who have used only the fruit from their Pyrgos vineyard and allowed it to undergo wild fermentation (not adding any commercial yeasts) and then throwing it in a mixture of new oak for five months for good measure afterwards. The incredible characteristic about this grape and the reason why it flourishes so well here is its ability to withstand the notorious European summer heat and still produce this white wine with depth, verve and remain at 13.00% alcohol. These are admirable qualities that are only enhanced by the other aspects of a complex nose of orange peel, fennel seed and white smoke, and a palate branching widely with a salty tang, a Vitamin C orange twist to the finish, woodworker's bench oak and slippery, silky texture.

This distinct white I tried was from the 2010 harvest, but look out for the 2011 vintage coming into the country in May.

HILBERG-PASQUERO Barbera d'Alba 2009

Roero, Piedmont, Italy. RRP \$45

As all the most romantic stories go, it all began in a bean field.

A young Italian Michelangelo completed his agricultural degree and wished to further his knowledge in organic farming, whilst a young German Annette was seeking a job with creativity and travelled to Italy to satiate an attraction to this newborn ecology movement. The rest, they say, is history, as their paths finally crossed in a bean field in northern Italy. Together, their passion for organic farming has led them to their vegetable- and animal-laden property with a vineyard where they craft their Hilberg-Pasquero wines in a tiny cellar in the town of Priocca in the Roero district.

I consumed this wine on my first visit to the Da Noi restaurant in Toorak. On that serendipitous evening, I was not only delightfully confronted with a brief appearance by the sylphlike figure of Ms Dita Von Teese, but also a stunning vibrancy and the fresh scent of violets that were emanating from my glass. The flavours strode a predominantly darker path of boiled red lollies, black liquorice and blood plums with soft flushes of lilac roses. Apart from a hint of earth and some black spice from the oak, the palate was otherwise juicy, and complementary to a range of dishes throughout the night.

This is a pure wine loaded with character, with Annette describing their efforts as, "Polyhedral: with the fresh and musical personality of the Neo-Latin branch, the precise, sharp and clear personality of the German character and - why not? - also the typical and unique aspect of the Piedmontese dialect." She may not be able to say whether their wine speaks more German or Italian, but it certainly unites their different temperaments and has proven that this really was a destined romance after all.