



Tim's Wine Market

December 2021

By JP Donnelly-Davis

We spend a lot of time spotlighting the great, old wine regions of Europe in the selections for this club. This month, we're going down under with two wines from the historic, and often overlooked, regions of Barossa and McLaren Vale. While not currently fashionable in the US, Australia offers some incredible wines and often at great values. This month, we will look at the wines and history of this incredible place and hopefully tempt you to take a closer look at other Australian wine regions.

Bethany Old Vine Grenache 2015 - \$30

When it comes to the propagation of Rhone varieties, such as Syrah, one region that immediately springs to mind is Australia's Barossa Valley. Here, thousands of miles from its native France, the variety (hereafter referred to as Shiraz, the local name) has made a name for itself. This is in no small part due to the region's Mediterranean-like, warm, dry climate and coastal influence. However, while single-varietal Shiraz may be the region's most recognizable (and commercially successful) wine, many Barossa winemakers cultivate old-vine Grenache as a passion project. This month, we will showcase one such example from the Schrapel family, whose history dates back to the settling of the region.

In a country so closely associated with British colonization, it may come as a surprise that many of the Barossa Valley's early settlers were of German heritage. Originally hailing from Silesia, Johann Schrapel and his family settled in the town of Bethanien (now known as Bethany) in 1852. Like many of their fellow immigrants, the Schrapel family carried cuttings of French varieties with them, planting Syrah and Grenache on their property alongside the other crops. A wine cellar soon followed, but although Johann achieved some measure of success as a winemaker, the family relied primarily on the sale of their grapes to larger wineries in the region.

The current iteration of Bethany Wines was founded in 1981 by Robert and Geoff Schrapel, Johann's great-great-grandsons. The two brothers built a gravity-fed winery in the old limestone quarry down the road and only produced two wines during their inaugural vintage: one barrel of Shiraz and a barrel of dry Riesling. At the time, South Australia was experiencing price collapse due to a surplus of wine, and the state government encouraged the removal of old Shiraz and Grenache vines in favor of new varieties. Luckily, the Schrapel brothers chose not to listen, and persistence paid off as the family's wines gained popularity and critical acclaim. As Tania Schrapel, Geoff's daughter and sixth generation winery owner, prepares to take the reins, she works closely with her father and uncle to preserve these unique old vines, some of which date back to the 1930s.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for around half an hour. Once decanted, this wine is an aromatic powerhouse with notes of wild mulberry, cranberry preserve, dried blackcurrant, red plum and the characteristic dried herbs and pencil shavings which develop with age. Drink now through 2023 with lamb chops, flank steak or cheeseburgers.

Chateau Yaldara Shiraz 2014 - \$30

Another Barossa producer of German descent, Hermann Thumm arrived in Australia in a decidedly different manner (and time period) than many of his compatriots. Originally born in the Russian Empire, the Thumm family produced wine in Georgia but fled in 1921 as the Red Army began its takeover of the country. Alongside other German-speaking refugees, they settled in Tehran, where the family lived comfortably until the British/Soviet invasion of Iran in 1941. Once again, the family was forced to give up viticulture, as Hermann and many other German ex-pats were rounded up by Allied forces, accused of being spies and shipped off to British-run internment camps. Like some of the continent's first European settlers, Hermann Thumm was brought to South Australia as a prisoner.

However, the family business would soon prove advantageous for Hermann, who had established a reputation as a well-behaved “model prisoner” at the Loveday internment camp. Many books were available to him, as the camp contained a number of professors and scientists, and Hermann studied viticulture and chemistry with whatever material he could find. He also became known for a bootleg sparkling wine, made in secret from local fruit and served in recycled bottles. Eventually it drew the attention of the camp guards, who rather than cracking down on his operation, wanted to know where they could get their hands on a few bottles! At the time of his release in 1946, these factors helped Hermann gain Australian citizenship, and the following year he purchased a small vineyard property in the Barossa. He named the estate “Yaldara,” the Aboriginal word for “sparkling,” a nod to his bootlegging past.

Today, Chateau Yaldara produces a wide variety of wine, both from estate vines and purchased fruit. The “Ruban” Shiraz is sourced from trusted growers in the coastal region of McLaren Vale, harvested early to maintain its natural acidity and prevent over-ripeness. 2014 saw cooler growing temperatures than usual in the region, which resulted in a small crop of elegant, earth-driven Syrah.

When you open this wine, I would strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. After decanting, the Ruban Shiraz reveals notes of mulberry, tart black cherry, dark plum, fresh-packed earth and black licorice. Drink now through 2024 with skirt steak tacos, brisket or beef short ribs.

Lamb Shanks with Lemon and Mint

When I bought these wines a few months ago, I immediately started thinking about what the recipe would be. Originally I was expecting these to be November features so I started with, well, turkey. But since we shifted to December I started to think that I love lamb with Australian wines, particularly mature Shiraz and Grenache, so that is where we start. This version from Cook’s Illustrated is a fantastic recipe that is not very hard but yields great results. For those who find lamb to be too heavy, this recipe addresses that with the addition of lemon and mint, which seem to lift the dish. I also find shanks are the perfect dish for entertaining, because once they are cooked, they hold for a long time without drying out.

**6 pounds lamb shanks (about 6 shanks),
trimmed of excess fat and fell (thin, white
papery covering)**

Table salt

1 tablespoon canola oil

2 medium onions, sliced thick

**3 medium carrots, peeled and cut crosswise
into 2-inch pieces**

**2 medium ribs celery, cut crosswise into 2-
inch pieces**

4 medium cloves garlic, minced

2 tablespoons tomato paste

**1 medium lemon, zested (reserved), and
quartered**

2 tablespoons minced fresh mint

2 cups dry white wine

3 cups low-sodium chicken broth

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Sprinkle shanks with salt. Heat oil in a large, nonreactive sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add shanks to pan in batches if necessary to avoid overcrowding. Sauté until browned on all sides, 5-7 minutes. Using tongs, transfer shanks to a plate as they brown.

Drain all but 2 tablespoons fat from the sauté pan; add onions, carrots, celery, garlic, tomato paste, the quartered lemon, a light sprinkling of salt and 1 tablespoon of the mint; sauté to soften vegetables slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Add wine, then chicken stock to the skillet, stirring with a wooden spoon to loosen browned bits from skillet bottom. Bring liquid to simmer; transfer vegetables and liquid into a deep braising pan, large enough to hold the shanks in a single layer. Add shanks and season with salt and pepper.

Cover pan (with foil if pan has no lid) and transfer it to the oven; braise shanks for 1 1/2 hours. Uncover and continue braising until shank tops are browned, about 30 minutes. Turn shanks and continue braising until remaining side has browned and shanks are fall-off-the-bone tender.

Remove pan from oven; let shanks rest for at least 15 minutes. Carefully transfer shanks with tongs to each of six plates. Arrange a portion of vegetables around each shank. Skim excess fat from braising liquid, add reserved lemon zest, remaining tablespoon of mint and adjust seasoning. Spoon a portion of braising liquid over each shank and serve.