



Tim's Wine Market

March 2023

By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

After a long and arduous uphill battle, traditional Australian winemaking has returned triumphant to the global stage! The days of bulk Shiraz and Chardonnay, as well as over-ripe and over-oaked reds, are far behind us, and the winemakers of Australia are returning to their Old World roots en masse. Of course, many of our favorite producers never deviated from those Old World roots. This month, we present what Tim likes to call “enlightened traditionalists,” winemakers who blend modern technology and know-how with traditional, lower-intervention practices.

Greenock Creek Shiraz 2019 (\$34)

It is no exaggeration to say that Greenock Creek is one of the defining names in Australian Shiraz. Founded by the Waugh family in 1988, the Greenock Creek philosophy revolves around the Old World idea that good wine is made in the vineyard, and the job of the winemaker is to express that in as few additional steps as possible. These are classic examples of Barossa Valley Shiraz, ripe and full-bodied while still finishing quite dry, and are renowned for their age-worthiness over time. Though the Waugh family have since retired, their vision is continued by winemakers Alex Peel and Peter Atyeo, who proudly source fruit from throughout the Barossa Valley's unique sub-zones.

To many of you the Barossa Valley may only conjure up images of hot, dry growing conditions and gnarled Shiraz vines, but the reality is more nuanced. Differences in elevation and sun exposure throughout the region, in addition to a wide range of soil types create many sub-zones in the Barossa, which means that even if a winery only produces Shiraz they can have a variety of characteristics to choose from to craft the final wine. The Greenock Creek estate vineyards are located in three of these recognized sub-zones, all along the western edge of the Valley: Seppeltsfield, Moppa, and Marananga. In addition, Alex and Peter purchase fruit from trusted growers throughout the Valley, paying particular interest to sustainable viticulture and terroir.

For their house Shiraz, the estate's own holdings in Marananga and Seppeltsfield provide most of the fruit. These sites are known for the additional mineral notes due to their bluestone and quartz soils. In addition, a heavy top layer of clay helps to retain moisture in the dry season, which lowers the need for irrigation. Fruit from the winery's partners in Moppa, whose slate soils contribute additional ripeness and texture, was also used in the finished blend. Unique to this area, all the fruit is hand-harvested to ensure only the perfect clusters of grapes are used.

To make this wine, the fruit is brought to Greenock Creek and de-stemmed by hand. A unique feature at the winery is their stone fermenters, made from slate and buried in the ground, a natural method of temperature control dating back a millennia. A wooden basket press is utilized for gentle extraction. Once fermented dry, the wine is matured in a combination of new French and gently used American oak for the better part of 20 months. Like all Greenock Creek wines, it is bottled unfiltered and with minimal intervention.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for up to an hour, as this wine has quite a bit of tannin structure and will show much better with some time to open up. Once it does, this wine delivers notes of blackberry preserve, cooked raspberry, fennel seed, milk chocolate, and black pepper. Drink now through 2030 with lamb chops with mint chutney, charcuterie with plenty of olives, or bacon cheeseburgers.

The Messenger Cabernet Sauvignon “Amadio Vineyard” 2019 (\$27)

This wine is a collaboration between two Australian legends: ex-pat and importer Rob McDonald, formerly of Old Bridge Cellars, and Caj Amadio, pizza chef extraordinaire and grower of some truly unique varieties in the cool-climate Adelaide Hills. The “Messenger” label is Rob's international project, where Rob works with a producer in a specific region to grow the grapes and make the wines to his specifications. Then he ships the wine in bulk to his winery in California, called Art &

Farm, where he ages and bottles the wine to dial in the attributes he hopes to display. However, this particular bottling is produced in the very vineyard it is sourced from, located on the Amadio family's property an hour outside of Adelaide.

While Cabernet Sauvignon is well established in the Adelaide Hills of today, this area was once considered too cold for the variety, and in the 1990s many contemporaries looked at the Amadio family with skepticism. This skepticism would only increase when the family supplemented their plantings of Cabernet Sauvignon with several native Italian varieties, including the tannic, warm-climate Sagrantino. However, a string of warm vintages attracted the attention of many high-profile clients looking to purchase fruit from the Amadio vineyard, and they quickly developed a working relationship with Penfolds in addition to bottling their own wines. Today, this particular vineyard block is considered one of the best sources of Cabernet Sauvignon in the Adelaide Hills. In addition to cultivating an early ripening clone of the variety, Caj trellises his vines in an old-fashioned double cordon system which maximizes sun exposure. Although the labeling laws in Australia do not require it to be listed on the bottle, most Cabernet Sauvignon that leaves the Amadio vineyard will have some Sagrantino blended in as well for additional color and complexity.

Rob has experience blending Italian varieties with Cabernet Sauvignon, as he enjoys the additional acidity and earth notes these varieties bring to the table. To make this wine, both Cabernet Sauvignon and Sagrantino are harvested at the same time, always at night in order to maintain its natural acidity. After co-fermentation in a mixture of concrete and stainless steel, the wine is racked to French oak barrels for 18-24 months depending on vintage conditions. The finished wine is then lightly filtered before bottling.

When you open this wine, similar to the Greenock Creek detailed above, I strongly suggest decanting for up to an hour, as the oak regimen and Sagrantino contribute plenty of additional tannin. On the palate, this wine delivers notes of dried red cherry, black plum, kirsch, caramel, black pepper, and pipe tobacco. Drink now through 2026 with garlic pork chops, marinated skirt steak, or grilled sausage and peppers.

Orecchiette with Sausage and Broccoli Rabe

Based on the heavy weight of the two selections this month, when I began looking for a complementary recipe I was drawn to protein heavy dishes. While sipping on a glass of the Cab I could not help but note the faintly herbal note, integral in all good Cabs in my mind, and how it might work well with a dish that plays off that note. Sure enough, in my notes on the Shiraz I also found a subtle note of menthol, which led me to this dish.

Personally, I love the combination of rich sausage with faintly bitter broccoli rabe. This preparation tames some of the bitterness of this maligned cruciferous veggie with a quick flash cooking. If you cannot find broccoli rabe, or just don't like it, substitute regular broccoli cut into florets. Serve this dish with either wine feature.

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
8 ounces bulk hot or sweet Italian sausage
5 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 pound broccoli rabe, trimmed and chopped into 1½-inch pieces
Salt and pepper
1 pound dried orecchiette
1/2 cup chicken stock
2 ounces Pecorino Romano, grated (1 cup)

Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add sausage and cook, breaking up with a spoon, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and pepper flakes and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds; set aside.

Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts of water to boil in large pot. Add broccoli rabe and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer broccoli rabe to skillet with sausage mixture.

Return water to boil, add pasta, and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve 1/2 cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Add sausage-broccoli rabe mixture, Pecorino, and chicken stock and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with remaining reserved cooking water as needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.