



JAMES HALLIDAY

Counting the cost

AROUND 20 PAMPERED journalists, sommeliers and retailers were recently flown to Tetsuya's restaurant in Sydney to taste the release of the Torbreck super-cuvee, '06 The Laird.

Inevitably, some of the conversation circled around the 2011 vintage, and chief winemaker David Powell was pulling no punches. "This is the worst vintage in the 35 years I have been making wine," he said. "I have declassified all my top red wines, and that will cost \$8 million in sales that can never be recouped."

Warming to the theme, he continued: "If I'm not prepared to buy and drink a wine, I'm not prepared to sell it." But the cash flows for his bankers assumed a one-in-five year's declassification of one or more icon wines, and that he had already declassified the '07 The Laird and '08 RunRig. "So I can't afford to declassify all the '09s, but even more I can't afford not to do it." He has made his views known in the Barossa, and received nods of understanding from winemakers who have come to similar decisions, and also criticism from others for being "disloyal to the

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Barossa". Since writing my first column on this subject (July 2-3), I have been told by direct sources that ambulance-chasers were following in the footsteps of viticulturists for the major companies that have reputations they don't wish to lose. As those viticulturists visited growers with severely botrytised red grapes and had to reject them, the undertakers would immediately step in with an offer of \$50 to \$100 per tonne.

It both angers and saddens me that these selfish, unprincipled mavericks are prepared to sabotage the reputation of Australian wine, and are so stupid that they cannot see the self-harm that continuing surpluses of poor wines will cause. The fine wine industry needs to have a healthy sub-premium base, but even more importantly needs to explain to export markets that these are fundamentally different products.

And so to The Laird. We tasted it against wines of similar age and price from Australia (Hill of Grace '05 and Grange '06), Italy (Gaja Sorì San Lorenzo '06), the Rhone (J.L. Chave Hermitage '06 and Guigal La Landonne '06), Bordeaux (Chateau Montrose '05), and Spain (Vega Sicilia Unico '00). A funny thing. There were no spit buckets. And I drank every drop of The Laird. 🍷



2006 TORBRECK THE LAIRD

The Laird is in limited production (646 dozen), and comes from a remarkable single vineyard owned by Malcolm Soppelt that David Powell had coveted for 15 years. The production involved normal open fermentation and basket pressing, then, following Guigal's "La La's", it spent three years in new and hideously expensive Tardieu-Laurent French barriques with staves 45mm thick. The oak is embedded in the fruit, supporting not overwhelming it; layer upon layer of gloriously complex flavours, the tannins superbly weighted. A magnificent wine from a great vintage. 14.8% alc, cork

Rating: 97 points

Drink to: 2036

Price: \$700



2010 TORBRECK THE STEADING BLANC

Torbreck makes several white wines in addition to its portfolio of reds, and it may be that this one will be worth chasing. It's a blend of marsanne, roussanne and viognier, all Rhone natives but seldom found together. It has a pure honeysuckle, melon and pear bouquet, offset by straw and lemon curd. The palate is soft and succulent, relying on texture and spice for its undoubted personality. 14% alc, cork

Rating: 90 points

Drink to: 2013

Price: \$37.50



2007 TORBRECK THE FACTOR

I've chosen this shiraz because it rises above the inherent toughness that marked South Australian reds in the 2007 vintage. Indeed, I have speculated Powell may have included 15% of '08 vintage shiraz, which is perfectly legal and does not require disclosure. Whatever, it is a lovely wine with moderate alcohol. Good colour; a complex and evocative bouquet with abundant black fruits and a touch of licorice, then a generous, ripe palate. 14.5% alc, cork

Rating: 93 points

Drink to: 2022

Price: \$125

Boccaccio

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UNLABELLED KING VALLEY 'THE PRINCE' SHIRAZ 2008

This wine makes a stunning return after a few years absence from our shelves. Truth be told, each vintage under the winemakers own label has always gone quite quickly without any opportunity for Boccaccio to buy some stock of a vintage. We managed to twist the winemakers arm and now proudly offer massive discount to the winemakers own label. The fruit for the 2008 vintage was hand picked and matured for 20 months in a mixture of French oak and then aged further in the bottle prior to release. The wine is showing characteristics, with white pepper and rich dark berry characteristics. With great drinking now, it will reward further cellaring. Lovely wine.

UNLABELLED BENDIGO 'AS GOOD AS IT GETS' SHIRAZ 2008

Medium dark purple in the glass; the nose is an alluring mix of mulberry spice and tobacco. The palate is ripe and full of an array of exotic dark fruit and fantastic palate length and structure. Fantastic drinking now but 6-8 years cellar will enhance this already beautiful wine. The vineyard is located a 20km east of Bendigo in the Campaspe River Valley nestled between Mt East and Mount Sugarloaf in the West. The well-drained ancient calcareous shallow and of low fertility. The region has a Mediterranean climate. The season, with warm summer days and crisp autumn nights, enhances the balanced wine grapes with intense flavour, full ripeness and balanced acidity. Fertile and meagre rainfall ensures low vigour, an open and disease-free and a preciously small yield of one ton to the acre (2.57/ha). The vines in winter to delay spring growth. This reduces the risk of frost damage as ripening into the cooler autumn months, further enhancing flavour.

UNLABELLED HEATHCOTE 'THE BRUTE' SHIRAZ 2006

The new vintage 2006 Unlabelled Heathcote 'The Brute' Shiraz continues from this fantastic producer. This wine is truly amazing and for lovers of Shiraz, it does not get much better than this. This big, dense and flavoured Shiraz is sourced from a low yielding vineyard near Heathcote. It is big and finished with firm tannins. This wine will repay 4-5 years of careful cellaring. Be enjoyed now for those who love big, robust reds.

UNLABELLED MARLBOROUGH 'THE ONE' SAUVIGNON BLANC 2007

This is made by one of New Zealand's most decorated winemakers the best fruit he could get his hands on. This is a pungent, classic Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc that delivers on all fronts. If you like all the class Sauvignon Blanc's priced from \$15 upwards you will love this wine that would sell for \$20 plus with its own label and offered for the basement price of \$8.00 a bottle.

UNLABELLED BAROSSA VALLEY 'THE ANCIENT SISTER' SHIRAZ 2007

A new vintage and an equally stunning wine. Quite possibly the best Valley unlabelled red so far. From the same cult Barossa producer Ancient One and The Ancient Brother, this wine aptly named 'The Sister' is also from an old Barossa Valley vineyard and like 'The Ancient One' and 'The Ancient Brother', this wine is from the same winery will price tag of this wine to be above \$40 a bottle. With deteriorating overseas markets, the same producer has decided to clear the entire 2010 vintage of this wine to Boccaccio. At \$12 a bottle, it's Ancient One, the Ancient Brother, the Ancient Uncle and Very Old Grandfather would have to represent the best value Barossa Shiraz Australia. Don't pay \$40 plus for Barossa Valley Shiraz, you can 'The Very Old Ancient Sister' and get a \$40 wine.

UNLABELLED KING VALLEY 'PINOT GRIGIO' 2009

King Valley is the heart and soul of Italian wine varieties grown in Australia. Families who have a history in wine back in Italy, they have transposed good qualities into this wine which is fresh, vibrant and alive; the perfect spring and summer drinking. This wine is made by one of the legends of the King Valley and offers sensational value at \$8.00 a bottle. Try Pinot Grigio that is as true to style as this? We couldn't!!!

OTHER FANTASTIC UNLABELLED WINES AVAILABLE

UNLABELLED ADELAIDE HILLS 'THE ROCKSTAR' SAUVIGNON BLANC 2008
UNLABELLED RIVERINA 'THE RUNAWAY TRAIN' SAUVIGNON BLANC 2008
UNLABELLED HEATHCOTE 'THE WINE THAT BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK' SHIRAZ 2008
UNLABELLED CLARE VALLEY 'THE GREATEST' RIESLING 2008
UNLABELLED AXEDALE 'THE AXE' SHIRAZ 2006
UNLABELLED HEATHCOTE 'THE BRUTE' SHIRAZ 2006
UNLABELLED YARRA VALLEY 'SIDEWAYS' MERLOT 2007
UNLABELLED CLARE VALLEY 'THE GREATEST' RIESLING 2009

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