



Given most circumstances I would have been inclined to write an article entitled, David Powell's Torbreck. But the Torbreck name that has come to represent a laudable style is not really what these wines are about. And although Dave would probably argue the toss with me regarding this point, knowing as well as I do the wines of Torbreck, what makes these wines stand amongst some of the world's most special wines is not their supreme plots of land, or their inclusion of fruit of 100 year+ vines or their minimal intervention winemaking. These factors are all a minimum standard for Torbreck. The exemplary features of the wines stem from Dave's relentless efforts, uncompromising winemaking vision and pig-headed stubbornness not to conform.

"I'm first and foremost a wine consumer," Dave reminds me during a recent lunch together in Singapore. "I love food and wine," he continues, tucking into a plate of wagyu beef and a glass of his 2005 The Steading. Dave is in the midst of his annual Asian tour. It was during the course of one such tour that I first met him six years ago in Japan. Having witnessed first-hand his passion for Asian cuisines and indeed wine experiences, it is easy to see how he got into this business and understand his impetus to constantly evolve the Torbreck name.

Dave and his new wife Liz (the winery's export director) have made concerted efforts over the last few years to build strong distribution for their wines in Asia by regularly visiting their trade clients and tirelessly hosting consumer tastings and dinners. Dave reckons around 20% of his production now goes to Asia with his largest market being Hong Kong followed by Japan. Other export markets include China, Singapore, Macau, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and India. After the domestic market and North America, Asia is now Torbreck's third largest market. Dave noted, "People in Asia are much more open to spend money on good Australian wines."

Like many producers, Dave has found markets like the UK, Australia's largest export market, saturated to the point of frustration. He is adamant that recent government funded marketing initiatives such as "Regional Heroes" are not working. "The Australian Wine Industry has done a bad job of saying, 'We make fine wine.'" Dave passionately points out. "Consumers think of Australia and they think Jacob's Creek or Yellow Tail. They (the government) think people are just going to trade-up eventually." Dave becomes increasingly hot under the collar when he recalls how in the past some of his wines have been rejected by the wine export board. "They won't let Torbreck export because they feel we'll bring the industry into disrepute," he laughs darkly. "I sell what I make. I feel ashamed about what my country is trying to do."

Even in the Barossa where wine production is only around 150 years old, Torbreck is new enfant terrible on the block, with a history that is at once brief, tumultuous and jaw-droppingly successful. The label's first vintage was as recent as 1995. Ten years ago the winery sold a mere 400 cases. Financial difficulties nearly crippled the winery when it went into receivership in 2003 following a devastating divorce from Dave's first wife. Custody of the winery went to a third party buyer but Dave stayed on as a managing director and the happy ending is that in 2008 Dave was in a position to buy Torbreck back in a joint deal with a US backer. Last year production hit an amazing 65,000+ cases, necessitating Torbreck's move this year to a newly built state of the art and eco-friendly winery, designed to ensure quality on this larger scale.

If the personal and financial turmoil behind Torbreck isn't enough for a few nail-biting episodes of Dynasty, the wines behind the dramatically titled labels certainly are. That first vintage there was only one wine under the burgeoning Torbreck (a forest in Scotland where Dave lumber-jacked for a time) brand name. That wine was to become the iconic RunRig, another name of personal significance to Dave, in reverence to a Scottish folk rock band that is in turn rather appropriately called after a communal land distribution system used by Highland clansmen. Today there are thirteen personally ascribed titles under the Torbreck umbrella. The broad range of wines isn't in itself so amazing, there are many top wineries around the world isolating lots of special parcels of land that give unique attributes and bottling them under site-specific names. But apart from two very small production cuvees, Les Amis and The Pict, Dave doesn't do single vineyard wines. Nearly all the wines he produces are blends of his inspired invention.

Dave concedes that while he doesn't go in for "special cuvees", the aim is for selected vineyards to go into the same wine each year. For example the components for RunRig consistently come from the same 8 "old and ancient" vineyards. On a somewhat larger scale, the Juveniles and Steading wines are comprised of up to 150 different components from around 34 different vineyards. Small batch winemaking and blending are the hallmarks of Dave's, er, Torbreck's style.

"My original idea was to do what I can do and do it well, focusing on just a few varietals, Shiraz, Grenache and Mataro." Like a many of the world's great chefs Dave has ultimately based Torbreck around sourcing the best raw materials. "When I first started the Barossa was a gold mine only most people didn't realise it," Dave went on to explain. "I set out to make wines that speak about a sense of place. I'm not the only one and I'm not the first one," Dave is quick to point out. Though in my opinion, there are few if any in the Barossa today who do it better.

At lunch Dave and I shared bottles of his 2005 Marsanne / Roussanne and 2005 The Steading. The Steading is possibly my favourite of Dave's wines, a GSM blend sourced from 48-150 year old vines. Its style is quintessentially Torbreck - remarkably old world with plenty of earth, spice and pepper characteristics yet it also has a fruity richness that is distinctly Barossa. The seamless structure, effortless balance and great intensity of aroma and flavour – we have Torbreck's David Powell to thank for **all that**.

Tasting Notes

Torbreck Marsanne / Roussanne 2005

90 points

Medium straw colour. The nose gives a great intensity of honeyed, floral, spicy notes with a core of lemon curd. There's a refreshing backbone of medium+ acidity on the rich, full bodied palate. Silken, almost oily texture and a very long finish. Drink now. Tasted November 2008.

Torbreck The Steading 2005

95 points

Very deep garnet colour. A wonderfully opulent nose that recalls elements of both Chateaufort du Pape and textbook Barossa: warm blackberries, moss, game, freshly cracked black pepper and five spice with a touch of dried Provence herbs. The medium+ level of acidity perfectly balances this wine's full body and the medium level of velvety tannins provides harmonious texture. Very, very long finish. Drink now – 2018. Tasted November 2008.