

Old vines, great wines

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June 25, 2009 - 8:28AM

A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of listening to one of Australia's great young winemakers talk us through his very different wines.

For a guy who makes some of the Barossa Valley's most unique and successful wines, Dave Powell was refreshingly affable and open.

It was a little frustrating 'cos he tends to waffle - about the good stuff though - and I really wanted to taste the wines in front of me about which I had heard so much.

I'm glad I listened, because it was only then I appreciated and understood how wines in the Torbreck stable stand apart from their contemporaries, much like Carla Bruni at a G20 function.

The comparisons with the French don't stop there - it's the careful treatment of old vines in French oak that gives the Torbreck reds in particular their distinct individuality.

Torbreck was founded by Dave Powell in 1994 but its real conception was in 1992 when Dave, working for Rockford, discovered a few sections of dry-grown old vines in the Barossa, which has some of the oldest vines in the world.

Near lifeless, he nurtured the vines back to health and made some wine from the small parcels of fruit - much like he does today.

He knew he was onto something, so he secured long-term contracts for fruit from other old vine Barossa vineyards and the rest is history.

He named the winery Torbreck after a forest in Scotland where he worked as a lumberjack, based his wines on the classic Barossa varietals of Shiraz, Grenache and Mataro and got to work.

Inspired by the intense flavours of the Rhone Valley in France, the wines are all open fermented, basket pressed, with small grape parcels from low-yielding vineyards producing quality across the entire range.

It's grassroots winemaking, stripped back, using raw materials and garnering flavour from the deep soil of the old vines.

No more than 20 per cent of new oak - and French only - is used for any wine, which allows the subtle and savoury flavours of each wine to speak for themselves. It's a beautiful thing.

A lot of good Aussie wines are renowned for protruding lots of oak elements that are hard to get past on the palate. Though the structure is there, the tannins and flavours are very much oak driven.

Torbreck wines, with only 20 per cent of new oak, are primarily fruit driven from the old, rich vines, some from the 1800s.

They are refined and spectacular in their own right. Here's some to go for:

UNCORKED - TORBRECK

Woodcutter's Shiraz 2008, 94pts, \$19.50

This wine has a complexity and texture rarely found at this price. Torbreck's top wine - the Run Rig (rrp \$225) was not made in 2008, which means higher-quality grapes went into this wine, making this particular vintage even better value than it already is.

Dave made this wine for himself - when he drinks wine at home alone he likes to sip on something that keeps his accountant happy. Vibrant upfront, with sweet cherry flavours, this is a fabulous portfolio wine for any cellar.

The Cuvee Juveniles 2008, 96pts, \$25

Made from the classic Barossa blends of Grenache (60 per cent), Shiraz (20 per cent) and Mataro (20 per cent), this wine is named after a cult Parisian bar owned by a friend of the winemaker. Despite the name, the youngest vines in this blend are 40 years old; the oldest 140 years. There's no oak in it because the fruit is good enough to stand and deliver on its own. It's got sweet bubblegum flavours with the Mataro adding grunt as well as cellaring potential. It's a *real* juvenile – young, gutsy and upfront. Get it.

The Gask 2007, 95pts, \$75

As Kath and Kim would say, this one's a little different, mmm unusual - and that's just in comparison to its eccentric Torbreck brothers. The Gask comes from a single vineyard in the Eden Valley (part of the Barossa) but it's only made when conditions suit. It's got rich coffee, mocha flavours and is all-encompassing in its power and panache. A truly individual wine from a unique winemaker.

Factor 2006, 95pts, \$125

This Shiraz is harvested from some of the oldest and revered vineyards in the Barossa. Bottled after two years in French oak, its flavours drift across the palate like the perfect Shane Warne leg-break. It's ethereal, pure and extraordinarily elegant. A must-try.

There are so many other Torbreck wines I tasted that I want to tell you about but, the truth is, if you see one at a bottleshop, just get it.

Don't let the weird names stop the great story from being revealed. The Torbeck philosophy all makes sense once you put glass to nose and lips.

www.torbreck.com

Any queries, questions or criticism to wine@watoday.com.au