

Australian wine presentation

"The one purpose of wine is to bring happiness"

THESE WORDS were uttered by Dr Henry Lindeman some 150 years ago in Australia, and are as true today as they were then. If anyone in Malta wanted any proof of this statement, all they had to do was to participate in one of the wine appreciation activities that were organised by Wands Ltd as part of Australia Week.

This special week, held between January 24 and 29, was co-ordinated by the Maltese-Australian Chamber of Commerce and Culture in collaboration with the Australian High Commission.

Apart from a series of special offers on selected Australian wines displayed all week at Wands Cash & Carry, Wands organised a tasting session at St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity in Valletta. Wines on display included a range from the leading Australian producers, including Lindemans, Penfolds and Rosemount.

In his short address, Wands managing director Anthony J. Tabone said: "This is another opportunity offered by Wands to the ever growing number of wine lovers in Malta to get to know more about particular wines and their respective origins. We, at Wands, were the pioneers in introducing new world wines, and particularly, Australian wines to Malta." Then Mr Tabone introduced Maxine Cavey, business development manager at Southcorp Wines Europe, who visited Malta for the occasion.

Australia has changed the wine world, bringing dynamism, enthusiasm, clever marketing and a down to earth appreciation of what the average wine drinker wants – consistent quality, delicious fruit flavours and affordable prices. Now its winemakers are increasingly focused on creating more individual and distinctive wines that reflect the regions and specific vineyard characteristics.

For many decades, Australian wines were consumed locally, but during the past 20 years there has occurred a revolution as Australia's wine exports have grown at a remarkable rate, and today Australia ranks as the sixth largest wine exporter in the world and has recently overtaken France as the biggest wine supplier to the UK.

Australia took a very different approach to presenting its wines compared with Old World countries like France, Italy and Spain. Generally, wines in Europe are identified and categorised first by the region they are grown and made – e.g. Bordeaux, Champagne, Barolo, Chianti or Rioja – and then by the producer's name or brand.

Australian wine companies took a different approach. They identified themselves as Australian first, understanding that "Brand Australia" – sunshine, beaches, "no worries" attitude – was their most powerful asset.

It is also relatively easy for one to become a connoisseur of Australian wines: all the information is on the labels. All one has to do is read them.

But now the Australians are striving to provide extra interest and sophistication to their wines by introducing and emphasising "regionality". With regard to Australian wines, "regionality" means identifying and demarcating specific vineyard areas and linking them with particular grape varieties that thrive in those environments – depending on soil types and climate.

Now that wine drinkers are familiar with "Brand Australia", they are being further encouraged to recognise and explore different regions to enjoy the diversity that comes from Australia.

Lindemans

Dr Henry Lindeman achieved international recognition within 19 years of planting his first vines at Cawarra in 1843. His Cawarra Claret was honoured at the London International Exhibition in 1862 and again in the 1867 Paris Exhibition. As with all his wines, Dr Lindeman had



WANDS WINE CONSULTANT Howard Price, Wands managing director Anthony J. Tabone, Mrs Helen Palk, and the Australian High Commissioner, Mr Palk.

included the most vital of ingredients – master craftsmanship and genuine passion.

During the evening at St James Cavalier, wine lovers had the opportunity to taste the easy-drinking Lindemans Bin 65 Chardonnay 2004, the crisp, blended, fruit-driven Lindemans Bin 35 Rose` 2004, Lindemans Bin 45 Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 with its generous flavours and contemporary style, and finally the complex yet consistently outstanding Lindemans Bin 50 Shiraz 2004.

Rosemount

In as little as 35 years, Rosemount Estate has established itself as one of Australia's leading wineries, producing a selection of prestige wines that reflects the riches of the Australian climate combined with an unwavering dedication to winemaking quality, innovation and style.

The three Rosemount wines savoured during the evening were Rosemount Estate GTR 2004, Rosemount Estate Diamond Label Sauvignon Blanc 2004 and Rosemount Estate GSM 2000.

The first is a delicious blend of two of the world's most expressive grape varieties: Traminer – also known as Gewurztraminer – and Reisling. The second is a multi-region blend capable of maintaining its lively fresh fruit characteristics. And the third – a blend of 50% Grenache, 40% Syrah and 10% Mourvedre – is a wine that has heralded a new chapter in the story of modern Australian wine since it was first released in 1994.

Penfolds

Where great wine from the New World is concerned, Penfolds have been responsible for defining the Australian style.

The story of Penfolds started in 1844, when a young English doctor, Dr Christopher Rawson Penfold, before leaving England had obtained some vine cuttings from south of France. Like many doctors, he had a firm belief in the medicinal qualities of wine.

The three wines from Penfolds Wine Collection consisted of the full-flavoured Penfolds Koonyng Hill Chardonnay 2002, Penfolds Bin 128 Coonawarra Shiraz 2000, which is a regional wine that reflects the unique climate of Coonawarra and is a Shiraz with a fuller style and structure, and the dry Penfolds Rawson's Retreat Shiraz Cabernet 2003 which also maintains the lively fresh fruit characters.

Australian High Commissioner Richard Palk concluded the presentation with some personal and, at times, humorous anecdotes about how the links between Australia and Malta may be actually closer than many may think.

Following the presentation, the guests had the opportunity to savour all the wines to the accompaniment of Aussie music by Ozzy Lino.

WINE TALK

by Michael Tabone

Favourite wine books

THERE IS no doubt that we wine lovers are among the easiest people to buy gifts for. To please us you don't have to worry about size, colour, shape, or preference. In most cases you don't even have to worry about whether we already own a particular present. There is always space for another decanter, a wine funnel, a set of glasses, corkscrew and of course another bottle of wine. The choice of things to buy for us is endless.

Among the many wine-related gifts that I like to give and receive, my favourites are good books. The choice of very good wine books is endless, with many new ones published every year to add to the large collection of classics. They are easy to find, too. All bookshops in Malta have a wine and food section and, from what I gather, business is very good with frequent new orders. Of course the choice on the various Internet book sites is unlimited.

Here are some suggestions on what books to buy next time you want to buy a gift for a wine lover or come to think of it, for anyone who is, or might be interested in the good things in life. As wine is an integral part of European history, culture and economics, some books also make excellent gifts for the home library or for education purposes.

For the home

There are many comprehensive, general encyclopedias on the subject but a definite must is the *Oxford Companion to Wine*. The third updated edition has just been published. This is edited by Jancis Robinson and in my opinion is the wine Bible. In it you will find everything you could ever want to know about wine – from history to laws, from geography to climate, from wine art to wine auctions.

Another good, but less intensive encyclopedia is *The World Atlas of Wine*. This is edited by Hugh Johnson and once again, Jancis Robinson. It is a useful book giving much importance to the geographical aspect to wine. Even less intensive and much more user friendly are Oz Clarke's *Essential Wine Book* and Joanna Simon's *Discovering Wine*.

These last two are easy to follow, and include useful information on tasting wine.

Winemaking

Without a doubt, the most comprehensive modern outlook on the methods and systems of growing and making wine is *The Art and Science of Wine* by James Halliday and Hugh Johnson. James Halliday is one of Australia's best renowned wine makers, and in this book he gives an outstanding analysis of how nature, art and science combine to make the infinite variety of the world's wines. Together with Johnson, they follow the decisions every winemaker has to take from the vineyard to the bottling process.

Equally outstanding is the classic *Knowing and Making Wine* by the father of modern wines, Professor Emile Peynaud. This was originally written in French in the 1980s and translated by Alan Spencer. Although many new methods have been developed since the Eighties, the principles of winemaking remain the same and this book still forms the basis of all French winemaking studies.

Wine history

A number of books have been written on the subject but the most complete offering, in my opinion remains Hugh Johnson's *Story of Wine*. This is an in-depth look at the origins of wine starting from the Phoenician period right up till the early 1980s.

Another favourite of mine is *Monks and Wine* by Desmond Seward, which

highlights the importance and influence that the Church had on the development of wine.

Specialised books

A number of wine writers specialise in a particular region or a particular subject and here I list some of the best works written on specific subjects

The New Spain (John Rutherford) – all you want to know about Spain.

Bordeaux (David Peppercorn MW) – an insight into the wines of Bordeaux written by one of the leading experts on the region.

Rhone Renaissance (Remington Norman) – a comprehensive look into the Rhone valley and Rhone varietals.

Burgundy (Serena Sutcliffe MW) – this pocket book gives details of the region and its producers.

Wine Vintages (Michael Broadbent MW) – Broadbent was the world's first acknowledged international wine expert. His tasting experience in unsurpassed as is his skill in writing direct, easy to understand tasting notes. In these books he details vintages dating back to last century.

Phylloxera (Christy Campbell) – a highly authoritative look at the insect epidemic that destroyed most vineyards during the end of the 19th century and how wine was saved for the world.

Italy (Burton Anderson) – Burton Anderson is the world's best English-language Italian wine expert. Everything you want to know about Italy.

Wine Tasting Workbook (Jancis Robinson) – easy-to-follow instructions on how to taste wine.

Wine with Food (Joanna Simon) – this explains the principles behind the art of wine and food matching.

Wine guides

A number of wine guides are published every year. The most popular yearly pocket book is Hugh Johnson's *Pocket Wine Book*. This gives brief information on all wine regions of the world and a large number of wines. Useful for a quick reference.

For a comprehensive guide to the wines of Italy, Gambero Rosso issue a yearly publication, as do the Italian Sommeliers Association. The latter is called *Duemilavini* and is very good to keep in touch with the many changes on the Italian wine scene.

There is a large number of guides on the wines of France. The Guide Hachette details more than 5,000 French wines. The highly controversial and influential American writer Robert Parker publishes yearly books on the wines of France. For the lovers of Australian wine, Oz Clarke has just issued *Australian Wine Companion*. Although not Australian, Clarke's knowledge of Aussie life and wine is enormous.

For lovers of South African wine, John Platter's *South African Wine Guide* gives a very informative look at most of South Africa's wines and wine producers.

An interesting guide is *Guide to Wine Grapes* by Jancis Robinson. This is unique A-Z reference to grape varieties and the wines they produce. Over 500 are listed.

Finally, for the best wine read, no book beats Jancis Robinson's *Confessions of a Wine Lover*. Jancis is in my opinion the world's leading wine commentator and here she gives us a hugely enjoyable account of her early wine life and all the colourful and interesting – some legendary – wine people she met along the way.

These include Philippe de Rothschild, Jacques Hebrard and Robert Parker. The book reads like a novel. It is educational, an eye-opener and great fun. A must.

Another favourite of mine is *Monks and Wine* by Desmond Seward, which mike@michaeltabone.com

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