

PENFOLDS KOONUNGA HILL  
SHIRAZ CABERNET



**“I don’t think there’s ever been such a thing as a crook Koonunga Hill. It’s always a reliable drop, but in top years you can expect something out of the ordinary.” – DON DITTER**



**OVERVIEW:** First produced in 1976, Koonunga Hill was named after the Koonunga Hill Vineyard planted a few years earlier in the Barossa Valley. The mid-1970s was a difficult period for the Australian wine industry. The red wine boom was over and cellars were full of surplus red wine. The export market was almost non-existent and marketers had to find new ways of moving excess volumes of allocated Penfolds Bin wine into a domestic market flush with stock. The winemakers came up with a robust barrel matured blend of Shiraz and Cabernet which at first release sold at under AUD\$2 a bottle! The wine was an instant hit, and for many years was the entry point to Penfolds’ portfolio of red wines.

Koonunga Hill, a multi-district blend based on Barossa, McLaren Vale and Coonawarra fruit, has since become a Penfolds classic with a reputation for over-delivery of quality at its price point. The wine never sees new oak, but relies on the maturation effect – a red wine character that is central to the Penfolds house style. Winemakers seek to maintain its style, weight and concentration each year, regardless of vintage conditions. Shiraz usually leads the wine, varying from 50% to 65+% of the blend. Koonunga Hill has a reputation for medium, occasionally long-term cellaring potential, but has always been crafted for immediate enjoyment upon release.

The panel all agree that the quality of Koonunga Hill has improved over the years. Today incoming fruit is batched and classified prior to fermentation. The wine components are then earmarked for maturation in three to four-year-old 300 litre hogshead barrels. These wines are checked regularly and topped up over a twelve month period. A benchtop classification also takes place prior to blending to make sure that the wine is of Koonunga Hill standard.

Although the label has changed over the years, the style has remained true to its vintage origins. James Halliday says, “The Koonunga Hill Shiraz Cabernet is a remarkable wine showing strong Penfolds winemaking style. The wine reflects the vintage and in good years represents incredible value”. While some of the older vintages are now past their prime, the panel was particularly impressed by the 1976, the first vintage, now considered a classic Penfolds year.

## **PENFOLDS KOOONUNGA HILL SHIRAZ CABERNET**

***First Vintage:** 1976*

***Variety:** Shiraz and Cabernet.  
The proportions vary but Shiraz is always the dominant variety.*

***Origin:** Multi-district blend from South Australia. Barossa Valley, McLaren Vale, Clare Valley, Coonawarra, Padthaway, Langhorne Creek and Bordertown. May vary considerably depending on vintage conditions.*

***Fermentation:** Stainless steel tanks.*

***Maturation:** 12 months’ maturation in three to four-year-old oak hogsheads.*

***Comments:** Labelled Koonunga Hill ‘Claret’ until 1991 vintage.*





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### SHIRAZ CABERNET

Koonunga Hill has a reputation for medium, occasionally long-term cellaring potential, but has always been crafted for immediate enjoyment upon release.

Improved vineyard management has heightened the quality of top vintages, particularly the 1990s, many of which are likely to further improve for some years to come. Don Ditter, Penfolds former Chief Winemaker and the creator of Koonunga Hill, comments, “We used to make this wine from excess components, but always in the Penfolds style. The wine has evolved and improved. I don’t think there’s ever been such a thing as a crook Koonunga Hill. It’s always a reliable drop, but in top years you can expect something out of the ordinary”. At the 2001 International Wine Challenge in London, Penfolds Koonunga Hill won ‘Great Value Red Wine of the Year’. In December 2003, the 2002 Koonunga Hill Shiraz Cabernet was listed as one of the top 50 New World wines by *Decanter Magazine*.





# PENFOLDS KOONUNGA HILL

## SHIRAZ CABERNET

1976 **Now** 2006 ★

Brick red. Still holding up well with plenty of richness and ripeness. The wine is showing complex and inviting cigar box/mocha-berry aromas and some dried seaweed/leathery characters. The palate is rich and ripe with spicy/coffee/dark fruit flavours and balanced by fine chocolaty tannins, finishing dry and sinewy. In remarkable condition.

1977 **Now**

Dark brick red. A fading wine with earthy/chocolate aromas and some stemmy notes. The wine is still drinkable but the fruit is drying out and the tannins are quite leafy. It's past its best. Drink up.

1978 **Now**

Brick red. Hazelnut/minty/camphor aromas and flavours with some cedar/driftwood complexity and bitter chocolaty tannins. A lingering but drying finish.

1979 **Past - Now**

Brick red. Slightly over developed nose with savoury meaty/earthy/sandalwood aromas and some leafy notes. The palate is quite lean and dry with leafy, slightly aggressive tannins, but some cedar earthy flavours. Certainly past its best.

1980 **Past**

Brick red. Very evolved wine with earthy/stemmy/minty aromas and some mocha notes. The fruit has dried out leaving a palate dominated by leafy dry tannins. Past.

1981 **Now**

Brick red. Dried fruit/driftwood aromas with some porty/jammy nuances. The palate is quite rough with soupy dry tannins, but it still retains some sweet fruit and concentration. Drink now.

1982 **Now**

Brick red. A savoury, developed wine with meaty/gamy/leafy aromas and some dark choco-berry/cedar characters. A leanly structured palate with pronounced but not overtly assertive tannins, some prune/chocolate/leafy flavours.

1983 **Now** 2006

Brick red. Concentrated and developed dark choco-berry/cedar/briar/leafy aromas with a touch of leather. The palate is rich and sturdy with mocha/prune/herbal flavours, dense tannins building up chalky and dry at the finish. Drying out.

1984 **Now** 2006

Brick red. Solid chunky wine with earthy/meaty/cherry fruit aromas and some minty/spicy nuances. The palate is still balanced with richness of fruit but the tannins are quite grippy. Will not improve further but should hold for a while.

1985 **Now** 2008

Brick red. Aromatic small berry/dark chocolate/jammy aromas with hints of mint/spice. Rich concentrated meaty/choco-berry/dried cherry flavours and supple ripe tannins. Still a good drink.

1986 **Now** 2006

Brick red. Elegant wine with developed dried red fruit/meaty/mushroom aromas. The palate is surprisingly lean for vintage, but shows some sweet fruit/mushroom/leather characters and fine chewy tannins. Holding but best drunk soon.

1987 **Now**

Brick red. Aromatic wine with plenty of chocolate/menthol/berry aromas and some polished leather nuances. A lean, sinewy, slightly underpowered palate with green tannins and fading fruit. Finishes short. Drink now.

1988 **Now** 2008

Brick red. Intense black berry/chocolate aromas with some savoury notes. The palate is certainly at or beyond its peak, but it still has plenty of sweet fruit and loose-knit but firm tannin structure.

1989 **Now**

Brick red. Developed wine with savoury/earthy/leafy aromas and some green bean characters. The palate is quite austere with some stemmy/vegetal/jammy fruit characters and green soupy tannins. Best to drink now.

Outstanding vintages ★



**1990** **Now** **2012** ★

Brick red. A very impressive wine with rich complex cassis/plum/mocha fruit with some spicy notes. Extremely concentrated and well-balanced palate with ripe choco/berry fruit flavours and supple ripe tannins. A wine with great texture and structure. In a class of its own!

**1991** **Now** **2010** ★

Brick red. Complex and savoury leather, vanilla, dark chocolate aromas. The palate is fleshy and concentrated with dark chocolate/dark cherry flavours and fine slinky tannins.

**1992** **Now** **2006**

Deep Red. Aromatic leafy/red currant aromas with some camphor characters. Red currant/plum/earthy flavours are intertwined with fine slightly bitter tannins. Still holding up well but should be drunk before tannins take over.

**1993** **Now** **2005**

Deep red. Intense plum/berry/briar/minty aromas and flavours. The palate is chocolaty but quite lean, with leafy tannins and only moderate concentration. Finishes tough and firm. Drink soon.

**1994** **Now** **2010**

*Medium red. Intense choco-berry/earthy aromas. A well concentrated palate with mocha/blackberry/earthy flavours and fine supple tannins. Finishes long and sweet.*

**1995** **Now**

Medium red. A light aromatic wine with some red currant/spicy/earthy aromas. A lightly structured palate with earthy/raspberry/mint flavours and fine brittle tannins. Needs to be drunk soon.

**1996** **Now** **2015** ★

Deep red. Rich smooth dark choco-berry/plum aromas. A highly concentrated beautifully balanced wine with choco-berry/plum/sweet spice flavours and ripe chocolaty tannins. A superb wine of exemplary quality.

**1997** **Now** **2007**

Medium red. More developed than the 1996 with cherry/menthol/briary/earthy aromas and flavours. The palate is medium concentrated with plenty of sweet fruit and fine slightly firm tannins. Builds up quite astringent at the finish. Drink soon.

**1998** **Now** **2020** ★

Deep red. Substantial wine with intensely rich and ripe cassis/plum aromas. A plummy supple and well-concentrated palate with plenty of fine chocolaty tannins. A wine of exceptional structure, weight and balance.

**1999** **Now** **2010**

Deep red-purple. Sweet juicy raspberry/blackberry Shiraz dominant aromas. The palate is very concentrated with plenty of sweet, jammy fruit and strong powerful tannins. This is probably a medium term wine and should be drunk before the tannins muscle in!

**2000** **Now** **2010**

Deep red-purple. Aromatic raspberry/redcurrant/violet aromas. A lightly concentrated but elegantly proportioned and lively palate with plummy/raspberry flavours and leafy tannins. Remarkable for its vintage.

**2001** **Now** **2010**

Deep red-purple. Intense raspberry/blackberry aromas and ripely structured palate with saturated blackberry fruit flavours and rich but strong tannins. A very seductive sweet fruit style.

**2002** **Now** **2012** ★

Deep red-purple. Crushed fruit/plum/mulberry/slightly herbal aromas and flavours. The palate is fresh and vibrant with plenty of sweet fruit and pronounced puckering tannins. Tannins are wrestling with fruit. Best to drink over next five years.

Outstanding vintages ★