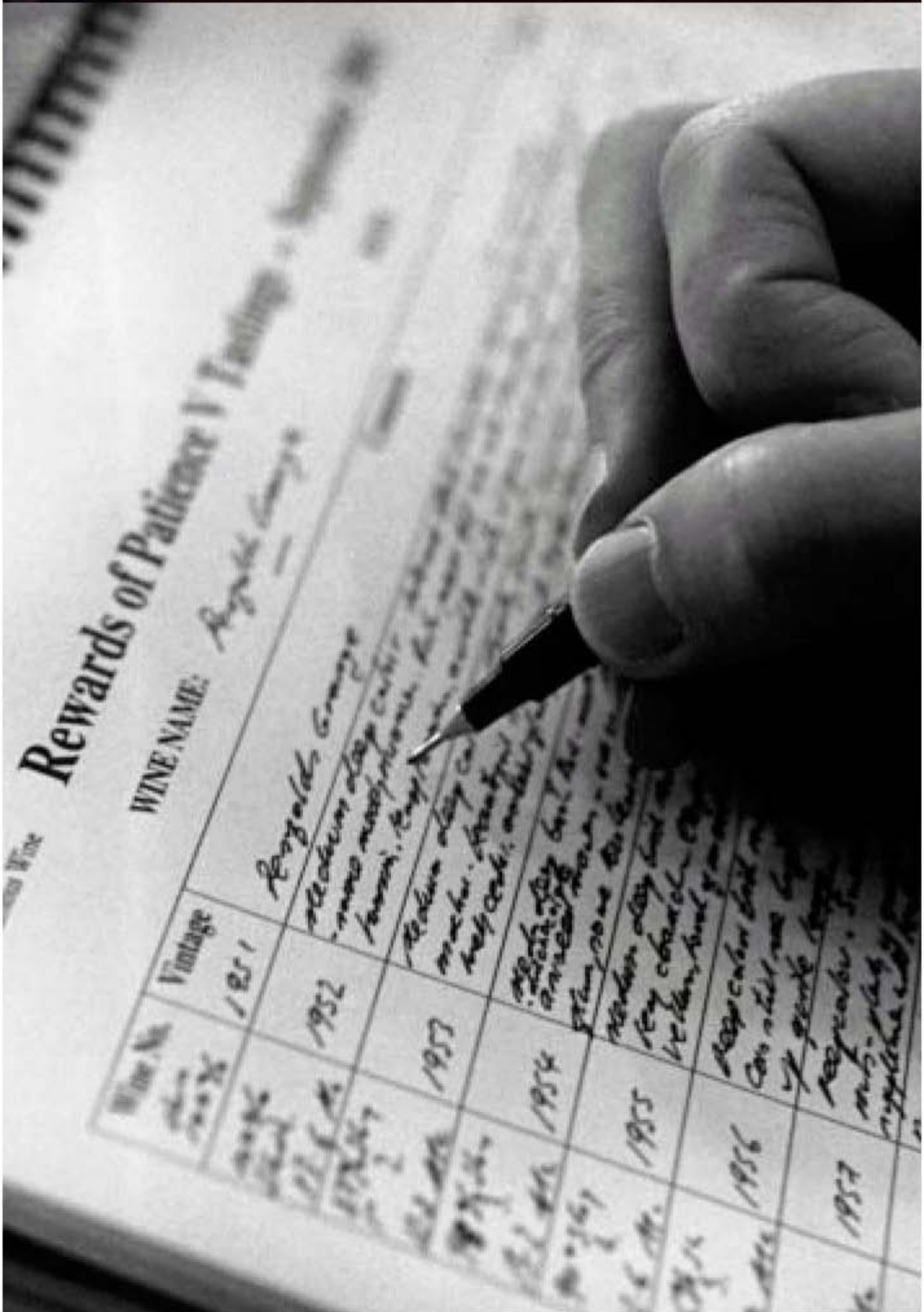


REFLECTIONS

ON THE REWARDS OF PATIENCE





CH'NG POH TIONG – SINGAPORE

Ch'ng Poh Tiong is the publisher of *The Wine Review*, *A Guide to Champagne*, and the world's first *Guide to Bordeaux* in Chinese. Poh Tiong's articles have also appeared in magazines, including Harper's, Decanter and Silver Kris, Singapore Airlines' inflight magazine.

As well as speaking at wine events around the world, Poh Tiong works as a consultant. His clients include FairPrice and Liberty Supermarkets and Conrad International Singapore. Poh Tiong lectures on wine extensively across Asia including: Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Hong Kong, China and Taiwan. He also speaks on wine to private clients, including international law firms, multinational banks and corporations, France's Sopexa, and the Wine Institute of California.

Ch'ng Poh Tiong is the founder of the Lianhe Zaobao Wine Review Annual Wine Challenge, Singapore's first independent wine competition. He was a judge of the 1999 Robert Mondavi *Decanter Magazine* 'Wine by the Glass' Competition. He has also judged wines in England, South Africa and Japan. His most recent publication is *Tables Singapore 2003*, an annual, independent dining guide to the 'Great & Greatest Tables' of Singapore.

COMMENTARY: I was struck by how well Penfolds wines age, particularly Grange, St. Henri, Bin 707 and RWT. Actually, what I really meant to say is that I was very impressed with the way the wines have evolved. After all, most wines have short to medium-term aging potential, but only great wines are capable of evolving into something more complex than the exuberance of their youth.

I also discovered when wines are tasted in the cold of the morning, they are less expressive than when the outside temperature is higher. Indeed, this is the very same discovery I've made when tasting Bordeaux primeurs or futures over the course of a week in spring in Bordeaux. When it's cold, as spring days can be, the wines are numbed and closed. And if a wine is young, acid and tannic, the acidity and tannins are even more tight and taut.

By way of corollary, I've found that when I open wines in the tropics, given our higher temperatures and humidity, the wines are also more giving of their aromas and fruit. This is a great

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bonus of course. However, we must also be careful that the higher temperatures and humidity do not, at the same time, rob the wine of its vivacity.

Finally, a word about what I think is Australia's next great wine. Based on what I have tasted in the past, and during *The Rewards of Patience* tasting, it's confirmed for me that Australia's next Great Wine is Grenache. The palate profile of this varietal in the southern Rhône, Spain and Australia is so very different. Sure, you get the generosity of fruit in all three major Grenache regions. But down under in Australia, the tannins are effortlessly velvety without sacrificing important structure and backbone. I am stunned by Grenache's adaptation and transformation in the hands of the growers who believe in this varietal in Australia.

Ch'ng Poh Tiong



JAMES HALLIDAY – AUSTRALIA

James Halliday needs no introduction in Australia – he’s an acclaimed wine writer, Australian and international wine show judge and founder of two of the country’s leading wineries: Brokenwood and Coldstream Hills.

He has written or co-authored over 45 books on wine since 1979, and has been a contributor to others notably, the *Oxford Companion to Wine* and *Larousse Encyclopaedia of Wine*. He won the Charles Heidsieck Award for Excellence in Wine Journalism in 1983. In 1993 he was joint winner (with Hugh Johnson) of the James Beard Award and Clicquot Award, as well as runner up for the Glenfiddich Award. He won the James Beard Award in 1994 and most recently, the Wine Literary Award (San Francisco) in 2002.

A wine show judge since 1977, James Halliday is currently the chairman of six regional wine shows, and judges at many others including shows in the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States, South Africa and New Zealand.

James Halliday’s contribution to the Australian wine industry was recognised when in 1995 he was presented with the country’s most prestigious wine award, the Maurice O’Shea Award, for his outstanding contribution to the Australian Wine Industry.

COMMENTARY: How or why a country with such a keenly developed tall poppy syndrome could ever be regarded as complacent, I do not understand. Or is it that the very accusation of complacency stems from the syndrome? I don’t profess to know the answer, but *The Rewards of Patience V* was not only the best tasting yet, but it underlined the incredible riches of Australia’s 150 years of vinous history.

True, the wine lands of Burgundy and Germany stretch back 2000 years or more, and wine has been an integral part of civilisation for two or three times longer than that. But Bordeaux was a creature of the late 18th century (courtesy of the soil draining technology of the Dutch) and the classification of Bordeaux wines did not take place until 1855.

It was only 30 years later that what is known today as Kalimna Block 42 was planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. And no matter how long the periscope of history is, this is the oldest planting of

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Cabernet Sauvignon in the world. What is more, it was planted on its own roots and can (with total legitimacy) be described as pre-phylloxera. (Some sleight-of-hand here, for phylloxera has never wrought its havoc on South Australia's vineyards, regardless of their age.)

Penfolds acquired the Kalimna Vineyard from D and J Fowler in 1945. One of the most memorable tastings of *The Rewards of Patience V* took place at the original homestead (1896) on the property. Rain, drove us from the planned tasting between the rows, so we moved to the open verandah of the house.

The tastings included all but one of the 100% Cabernet Sauvignons known to have been made by Penfolds from the block. The missing link was a 1948 Cabernet Sauvignon which had been given to John Duval, and which he shared with the judges at Len Evans' Chairman's dinner at the Royal Sydney Wine Show some years ago. I was one of four *Rewards of Patience V* participants present at that dinner and shared in what was a magnificently rich wine – to my mind a more direct forefather of the 1996 Block 42 than any of the four intervening wines, except perhaps the mighty 1953 Grange Cabernet Sauvignon.

Why didn't Max Schubert persist with the Block 42 sourced Grange and why has only one Block 42 been made since 1996? Schubert's answer was the shortage of Cabernet Sauvignon (other than the limited resource of Block 42); Duval's answer is that the Barossa Valley is not the perfect climate for Cabernet, with an implicit acknowledgment that Block 42 provides a cornerstone for Bin 707.

Be that as it may, this tasting was the highlight of four transfixing days. (Yes, even more than the 50 consecutive vintages of Grange, however unlikely it is that this latter tasting will ever be repeated.) It underlined the value of the inheritance we have from the second half of the 19th century, the sheer quality of the wines in question, and the uniqueness of the resource.

The last was the major take home message from *The Rewards of Patience* tasting. What other wine company in the world could stage a tasting of such breadth and depth? The answer is – absolutely none!

James Halliday



HUON HOOKE – AUSTRALIA

A leading independent wine writer, Huon Hooke makes his living entirely by writing, judging, lecturing and educating about wine. A journalist first, and a wine professional second, he has tertiary qualifications in both fields and has been writing about wine since 1983. His current quota includes two weekly columns in *The Sydney Morning Herald's Good Living* section and *Good Weekend* magazine, and regular articles in *Australian Gourmet Traveller Wine* magazine, for which he is a contributing editor.

He co-authors the best-selling annual Penguin *Good Australian Wine Guide*, writes for the British wine magazine, *Decanter* and the various wine-related publications of Italy's Slow Food organisation, judges at least ten wine competitions a year in Australia and overseas, runs wine courses in his home town, Sydney (notably at the Sydney University Continuing Education Centre), and chairs the judging panel of the annual Tucker Seabrook Restaurant Wine List of the Year Awards. He's been a wine show judge for 16 years.

COMMENTARY: For a wine lover, being invited to *The Rewards of Patience* tastings is the ultimate kid-in-a-lolly-shop experience. I was reminded, not for the first time, what a wealth of superb wine Penfolds produces. Not only is there high quality over many vintages at the top end, with Grange, Bin 707, Bin 389 et al, but quality is also there at the lower end, where Koonunga Hill and Rawson's Retreat provide amazing value and can age remarkably well. Most of the Koonunga Hill reds, dating back to 1976, are still drinking well. This is a rare thing for such an inexpensive red wine.

It seems to me that the greatness of Penfolds is almost taken for granted these days. We are spoilt rotten with good wine and there is a certain ho-hum factor in a company that puts out such consistently superb, age-worthy wine, year after year. Jaded members of the trade and media, not to mention the public, need to be reminded periodically of what an outstanding company it is. These days we are so inundated with new wines, many of them made in flashy, opulent styles, arrestingly packaged and designed for immediate gratification, that we are like the dog with the bone looking at its own reflection in the water. We are drawn to the other, seemingly more attractive bone and in the lunge for it, we drop the one we already had. The easy availability of most of the

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Penfolds' consistency of style creates an impression of a wine company with a definite philosophy of winemaking and an unwavering integrity in the way it goes about its business.

Penfolds wines seems to make them less exciting than the tiny output of some fashionable new boutique. Widely advertised discount prices add to the perception that Penfolds wines aren't quite as special as they were.

Well, I'm happy to say the wines are still where they've been for the 20-odd years I've been writing about wine - at the top of the tree. The consistency of quality is quite amazing, notwithstanding the style variations produced by seasonal conditions. And that is another of the fascinations of these tastings - vintage characteristics are clear throughout the portfolio. The great quality years tended to be great throughout, from Koonunga Hill up to Grange, and there are distinct vintage patterns in structure and flavour. There could scarcely be a better example of how different a trio of consecutive vintages can be than 2000, 2001 and 2002.

Penfolds' consistency of style creates an impression of a wine company with a definite philosophy of winemaking and an unwavering integrity in the way it goes about its business. No doubt this has a lot to do with the 'firm hand on the tiller'. There have been only four Chief Winemakers at Penfolds since Max Schubert set the direction in the 1940s: Max Schubert, Don Ditter, John Duval and now Peter Gago. Hence, Penfolds has been more immune to fads and fashions than other wineries.

We live in the age of sound bites and short attention spans. It's heartening to see Penfolds swimming against the tide and sending out messages (this book and the re-corking clinics are unique) that encourage us all to cellar wine and give it time so that it can build complexity and realise its full potential. Even if we drink young, current-release wine most days of our lives, let's not forget the joys of drinking a well matured bottle on a special occasion.

Huon Hooke



JOANNA SIMON – UNITED KINGDOM

Award-winning wine writer for London's *The Sunday Times*, Joanna Simon writes a column in its *Style* magazine, neatly sandwiched between Tom Conran and AA Gill. She also contributes to the Travel, Books and Doors sections and has edited three large-scale part works, the last one in 2001.

Since her 1987 appointment to *The Sunday Times*, she has written a weekly article as well as contributing to many other publications worldwide including: *Decanter*, *Australian Gourmet Traveller Wine*, *Harpers*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Tatler*, *Whisky Magazine*, *BBC Good Food*, and *Country Living*. Before joining *The Sunday Times*, she was editor of *Wine* magazine and before that editor of *Wine & Spirit International*.

Her books include: *The Sunday Times Book of Wine*, first published in 2001 and now in ten languages; *Discovering Wine*, which has sold nearly 300,000 copies in 12 languages, and which was published in a completely revised edition in May 2003; and *Wine with Food*, the research for which involved several years of strenuous eating and drinking. *Wine with Food* has been published in many languages, including Japanese, German, Portuguese and Dutch.

Also a broadcaster, Joanna Simon presented *The Bottle Uncorked* in 1999 – BBC Radio 4's first series devoted entirely to wine. Her television appearances have included advice on matching food and wine, buying fine and rare wines at auction, and vodka. When not writing, tasting, talking about wine or visiting the world's vineyards, she spends as much time as possible in a remote part of France.

COMMENTARY: When I tell people what I do, they invariably say, "What a wonderful job!". I try to make it sound tough, with tales of tasting raspingly tannic young reds and searingly acid whites in freezing European cellars at 8.30 in the morning. But they still look envious, rather than sympathetic.

So when I told friends and colleagues that I was going from London to Adelaide and back via Dubai, Perth and Singapore in slightly less than six days, with the sole purpose of spending three days on the ground tasting a few hundred wines, their reaction was oddly gratifying. "You're completely mad," said one and all, although some put it less politely.

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Inspiring wines showed the resourcefulness and talent of Penfolds' very short succession of Chief Winemakers.

In truth, I had my own doubts, especially on that first morning. Taking my seat in Mount Lofty House an hour after getting off the plane, I reached down to get a pen from my bag on the floor. The floor came up to meet me halfway and then spun around, taking James, Joseph, Ch'ng Poh Tiong, Peter, Huon, Andrew and John with it. Not a drop had passed my lips, but I was deeply jet-lagged.

Once a few drops had passed my lips in both directions (yes, it grieves me, too, to think of the fabulous, historic wines I spat out), I felt much better. Who would not have been revitalised by tasting a flight of Bin 407s starting with a 1990 that was full and supple, well-developed and yet still fresh?

And that was only 407. Over three days, there were, among others, 20 vintages of Magill Estate, 33 of Bin 389, 28 of Bin 707, 44 of St. Henri Shiraz and 50 of Grange. While the flight (a complete liquid history) of St. Henri demonstrated, that this is Penfolds' unsung hero, the quality and longevity of Grange over half a century shows beyond doubt why it has achieved its legendary status, not just in Australia, but in the world at large. Tantalisingly, it also showed that some of the greatest Granges are comparatively low in alcohol. The 1955 is 12.6% and the 1971 is 12.3%. Now, there's something for winemakers everywhere to ponder.

There were also 11 Special Bin reds spanning three-and-a-half decades – inspiring wines that showed the resourcefulness and talent of Penfolds' very short succession of Chief Winemakers (whom we were privileged to have tasting with us, the late Max Schubert excepted of course). And then there was the Block 42 flight: five wines from four hectares planted in the 1880s and said to be the oldest Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard in the world. As I tasted the 1953 Grange Cabernet (a Block 42 wine and the only Grange Cabernet ever made), I signed off my tasting note with the word “perfect” – and knew I'd made a terrible mistake. I had spat it out. With that, I drained my glass and swallowed. I like to think I learn by my mistakes.

Joanna Simon



JOSEPH WARD – UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For the past twelve years, as Wine Editor and Wine Columnist for *Condé Nast Traveler*, Joseph Ward has been visiting the world's wine regions and interviewing winemakers. His articles conjure a vivid sense of place, which he considers essential to understanding fine wines.

He has reported on the familiar: Napa, Bordeaux, and Tuscany, and the less well known: Chile, Casablanca, South Africa's Walker Bay and New Zealand's Central Otago, always looking for exciting, distinctive wines. Joseph Ward has a special interest in the wines of Australia and New Zealand. *Condé Nast Traveler* has been a leader among American magazines in reporting on these two countries.

An experienced journalist, Ward began writing about wine for *The Wall Street Journal Europe* in 1983. He lived in Europe for fifteen years and understands the markets on both sides of the Atlantic. His articles have appeared in various publications including *Smart Money* magazine, *The Washington Post*, and *The International Herald Tribune*. For seven years Ward was the wine columnist for Canada's *The Financial Post*. His book, *How To Buy Fine Wines: The Christies Guide*, written with Steven Spurrier, was one of the first books to deal with wine auctions and wine as an investment.

COMMENTARY: As great, and as much fun, as *The Rewards of Patience* tasting was, it would have been better as a five day event. As we rushed to finish sessions on the first two days, and even the third day, one or more wines were short changed in the discussion.

The wine that most deserved further discussion was the Bin 707. From 1986, maybe even 1984, there are some stunning 707s, and very few duds. When there is a problem, it is with tannins and acidity, and this is less of a problem of late. There is an amazing amount of fruit in the top vintages of 707. While the cassis and plum are textbook Cabernet, the texture is something else entirely. The wines are concentrated and rich with a sweet fruit character seldom found in Cabernet, certainly not in Bordeaux, nor in Napa where concentration is often accompanied by an over-extracted (definitely not sweet) character.

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The best 707s are singular, exotic (to a non-Australian palate) yet recognisably Cabernet Sauvignon. Although I am reasonably familiar with recent vintages of Bin 707, I have had limited experience with older wines. I found the evolution of a style over nearly 40 years to be one of the most fascinating experiences of the week. The 1964, of course, is brilliant, but atypical. It is not until the mid 80s that the winemakers let the fruit rip and the wine becomes both great, and unmistakably Australian.

The Grange tasting was overwhelming. The young wines are so rich, so concentrated, and so powerful that they nearly trigger sensory overload. Fruit, oak, tannin all just wash over the palate like a giant wave. I can't imagine drinking a young Grange. With the older vintages one has to be constantly aware, because there is something interesting in every crevice and corner.

The fruit remains intense for a long time, delaying the onset of a mature phase. The persistence of the fruit, not just through the wine, but through the decades, is what sets Grange apart. Structure is important, of course, but structure, as we've seen, is seldom a problem with Penfolds reds. Fruit justifies structure.

I hope to be around long enough to taste the 1990, 1996 and 1998 Granges as they approach maturity, because they are as great and as complete as any young wines I have tasted. I suspect the 1996 will develop a bit like the 1986, the 1990 will be the most balanced and assured at every stage of development, and the 1998 will be the most talked about, and maybe the most controversial of the young Granges.

I regret that I never had an opportunity to taste older vintages of St. Henri when they were in their prime. It was frustrating to taste the first dozen or so vintages and to get so little out of them. The 1976 was superb, as was the 1986, but since 1990 the wine has become consistently excellent. Were the older vintages this fresh and supple when young? Or is St. Henri stylistically different? Whatever, the 1990, 1994, 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2001 are outstanding – big without being overpowering; very ripe, yet still fresh. Balance and elegance set St. Henri apart from the other top Penfolds reds.

Joseph Ward

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