



Walking with dinosaurs

BAROSSA STYLE

Story by ROB GEDDES - Master of Wine

The Barossa Valley and its little sister Eden Valley, at least in size terms, are in a state of change when it comes to their wines. Not the stirrings of an adolescent region, this area known in wine circles for its web of old vines and equally old German families now has a distinctive modern edge to their offerings.

Leading producers not only respect their patrimony but are moving to make wines of decisive modern quality.

I was there for the Shiraz Alliance just after the winter equinox and overheard a discussion of "seben schlaft" the old German saying that if rain doesn't fall within seven days of the shortest day it would be a drought. It didn't rain and still looks like it will not.

Not only have the wines evolved but the places where the wines are consumed have moved with the times as well, such as the newcomers Murdock Cellars www.murdockwines.com.au with their modern cellar door and smart New York style restaurant provides a slightly surreal air in a valley where every vine and path has a long story.

As with any evolution there is huge history to be discovered and marveled at in the Valley that has been driven by a few long serving German families who respect their region and its assets.

I was recently a guest at a tasting put on by Langmeil (meaning Long Mile) of the Freedom Shiraz drawn from vines. The Cellar Door and associated buildings contain a relic of the old

Barossa village life from the 1850's with the boot maker and blacksmith stores virtually being in original condition. Ask if they can direct you to the smiths building where he was no doubt in hurry and calculated his customer's bill with a pencil on the wall!

Langmeil came into being after the Lindners, a long established family decided to rescue the ancient derelict old vineyard near by. Subsequent research by local historians suggest it may well contain the oldest vines in the Southern Hemisphere at 144 years (give or take a year or two). Nevertheless the vines aren't complaining as their fruit goes into The Freedom, a rich Shiraz in the savoury style that the Barossa can do so well.

Just down the road, one of the world's greatest vinous riches awaits the thirsty traveler at Seppeltfield-home to the oldest wine on continuous release in the world, Seppeltfield 100 Year Old Para Liqueur Vintage Tawny. The day I visited, their Cellar Door manager generously showed us the 1907 vintage which is the best yet that I have seen from this label.

Tasting 100 year old "ports" is not an everyday experience and nor

is Seppeltfield. Its buildings freshly painted and proud are like the day that they were built. Wandering around here you can easily forget which century you are in, especially after tasting the delicious dry fino and sweet Oloroso sherry styles made here.

If you have a love of wine take the "The Legend of Seppelt" tour (\$55.00) which starts in the original 1851 family homestead and reveals the Seppelt family story, their winery by the Para river and the cask hall laden with a complete set of single vintage tawny's from 1888. The aroma alone makes this an interesting walk and it takes two hours including the tasting. The taste of the 100 year old lingers long after thoughts of the cost.

To feel the Barossa's cultural pulse, take time to have dinner at the Tanunda Club, a cooperative established by the local German families in the 1800s and still thriving today. It was closed by an anxious government in WW1 although the only revolution you will hear today is about wine styles. It's friendly and shows the pride they all take in their Valley.

The depth of history will amaze as I discovered when invited to play Kegeling (an ancient form of nine pin bowling). The club is celebrating its 150 years in existence and jokingly says there is an age limit for membership so no one under 70 will be considered. The alley is the original model from the same experience at Sovereign Hill in Victoria.

Eden Valley, the taller and quieter edge of the burlly Barossa includes some wonderful Cellar Doors including the classic Yalumba and Henschke and further



along the smaller Radfords, Mt Adam and Poonawatta, all home to great Shiraz.

Here the higher altitude produces a cooler climate and is reflected in the bright red fruit especially raspberry and blackberry flavours of the local Shiraz. Less full bodied than the valley floor, they are intensely flavoursome and fresh and provide a nice alternate view to the riches and opulence of the Valley floor.

They say it takes a lot of beer to make a good wine and it takes a lot of beer to satisfy the thirsty winemakers of the region. Try stopping at the Springton pub where they age their Coopers for 12 months before serving it which is a unique take on a unique beer in a unique valley.

For more information on the Barossa Valley contact the Barossa Visitor Information Centre in Tanunda. Tel: 1300 852 982, email: info@barossa.com or visit their website: www.barossa.com

Clockwise from top left:

Wine tasting;

The beautiful Barossa;

Red wine.

Images courtesy

Barossa Tourism