

WINES TO WATCH



TEXT NICK RYAN

In Their Stride

With talent, confidence and a clear vision of what they want, three producers from across the country are turning out wines guaranteed to hold your attention.

FLETCHER NEBBIOLO

Dave Fletcher is a young man with lofty ambitions. While many winemakers would recoil from the traps that lay in wait for anyone trying to climb the summit of great nebbiolo, Fletcher has taken on the challenge with confidence.

"It can take a lifetime to master a variety like nebbiolo," he says. "So I figure I might as well start now."

It's a bold attempt to make a statement with a variety that can break hearts as easily as it can capture imaginations.

"Sure it's a bastard variety from the beginning," he explains. "It needs careful clone and

site selection, an almost perfect growing season, and constant nurturing from vineyard through to bottle, but if you pull off a good result, you end up with a wine that is truly spectacular."

His career in the industry started at 15, delivering 20-litre plastic containers of wine from a contract facility in McLaren Vale to old Italians throughout Adelaide's suburbs who no longer made their own. His development was formalised through the University of Adelaide, stints at O'Leary Walker in Clare and Sticks in the Yarra Valley, plus flying vintages in Burgundy and Kazakhstan. Yes, Kazakhstan. But it was several harvests

worked with Piedmontese producer Cerretto that sparked Fletcher's nebbiolo obsession.

The first flowering of that obsession is two wines released back in September: one from the Adelaide Hills and another from the Pyrenees. They are the product of an extensive search for sites. "Nebbiolo reacts to temperature quite a bit," he explains. "Too cold and you won't get the ripeness of the fruit flavours and tannin structure, too warm, and you'll ripen the sugars quickly, but not the flavours and tannins. Consistency of moderate temperature is the key, coupled with precise viticultural adjustments to suit the site."

The other crucial factor for Fletcher was vine age – nebbiolo can take a while to find its feet – and he narrowed his search down to vineyards established for at least 10 years.

The last piece of the puzzle was a little more esoteric. "The vineyards had to be run by people with the same passion for the variety that I had who were willing to work together to achieve the highest quality."

All this led him to the Ann Mary Lees Vineyard between Woodside and Charleston in the Adelaide Hills, a mixed clonal planting established in 1998, and the Malakoff Estate Vineyard in the Pyrenees near Avoca planted on red ferrous soils in 2000.

The winemaking methods applied to both are fairly consistent; they only see old oak so the differences in the two are driven by site. And the differences are stark.

The 2010 Fletcher Ann Mary Lees Vineyard Nebbiolo (A\$50) is fine-framed, almost willowy, but still shows all its wiring. It's a pale, late sunset colour and bristles with aromas of dry rose petals and cherry skins, rubbed tobacco and a touch of dry herb. It's juicy and pert, nicely poised and delivers the variety's trademark tannic kick with gentility and restraint.



The **2010 Fletcher Malakoff Estate Vineyard Nebbiolo** (A\$50) is an altogether hairier beast, a wine of rusticity and nostalgia. It's fuller, richer and a good deal funkier, tasting of dark cherry, the oft-mentioned tar, and a mug of stewed tea. It's sturdier and more forthright too, with dusty tannins building momentum through a long and firm finish.

At the time of writing Fletcher was in Piedmont bottling the wine he'd made in 2009 in Barbaresco, which will be released in February 2012, followed by a sparkling nebbiolo from Pizzini family vineyards in the King Valley. Production on all four wines is under 100 cases for each.

LAISSEZ FAIRE

If anyone could sit back and relax a bit, content with their winemaking lot in life, it's Larry Cherubino. The acclaim for his current venture, a three-tiered suite of brands climb-

wine a natural resistance and alleviates the need for protection.

The wines are both notable for their freshness and inherent energy. The riesling hums with lifted florals and deep-set minerality. It's amazingly pure and precise and possibly the strongest vindication yet of Cherubino's ardour for riesling from this remote location.

The **2010 Larry Cherubino Laissez Faire Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz** (A\$49) is on the lithe side of middle-weight, taut and tensile, with a long, willowy finish and tannins like crumbled sandstone. It's beautifully balanced, unhurried and unforced.

Paul McCartney was clearly on to something when he said, "Let it be".

D'ARENBERG GRENACHE

To say Chester Osborne is a prophet preaching the glories of grenache is not just a bit of wine-writing hyperbole. He is after all the

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ing from the approachable AD Hoc range through the single-vineyard series The Yard and the top-end Cherubino label, has been as effusive as it's been widespread.

But Cherubino isn't one to rest on his laurels, and his constantly enquiring mind has turned to a new project that intends to make a statement by doing virtually nothing.

The Laissez Faire label is Cherubino's home for grapes from ideally sited and set-up vineyards that allow him to push the non-interventionist winemaking envelope. At the best of times, Cherubino uses a light hand in the vineyard or the winery, but for the Laissez Faire wines he is even more reluctant to interfere.

Two wines wear the label so far – a riesling from the Porongurups and a cabernet shiraz blend from Frankland River. The vineyards, although not certified, are virtually organic and the wines receive the lightest possible filtration from organically derived plant proteins and the barest addition of sulfur.

The **2011 Larry Cherubino Laissez Faire Riesling** (A\$29) comes in with a pH of 2.8 and acidity sitting around nine grams per litre, a balance that Cherubino feels gives the

only winemaker I can think of who has written a film script about kitchen appliances coming alive and discussing the merits of the variety while the household sleeps.

Grenache is already a major player across the d'Arenberg portfolio and you'd think that Osborne would need to have a pretty compelling reason to add any more. In fact he has two.

Two new single-vineyard grenache wines from the very strong 2009 vintage – The Beautiful View and Blewitt Springs – are possibly the best things Osborne has ever done with the variety. They're complex, deeply etched and serious.

The **2009 d'Arenberg Beautiful View Grenache** (A\$99), appropriately enough, is the prettier of the pair, with plenty of bright red fruits and spice, while the **2009 d'Arenberg Blewitt Springs Grenache** (A\$97) is a little broodier, earthier and gamey. What both share is a profundity of structure, impressive architecture supporting the plushness and opulence of the fruit.

If you ever doubted that grenache has claims to greatness these wines will change your mind, conclusively. 

