

Overachievers Down Unde

Jamsheed

Jamsheed makes modern-style wines that display tremendous and distinctive personalities, at alcohol levels that seldom exceed 14 percent. The wines, which center on Syrah from various parts of Victoria, are expansive and not pinched, offering firm structures, open textures and a savory spiciness to balance the pure fruit.

Owner and winemaker Gary Mills calls his versions Syrah rather than Shiraz—the more common term for the grape in Australia—to emphasize the less weighty style of his wines.

Mills took a circuitous route to winemaking. Born in Perth, he played baseball professionally in Japan before blowing out his shoulder and taking up a career as an English teacher. Later, a four-year sojourn in the United States, with stints at Ridge, in California, and WillaKenzie, in Oregon, influenced his decision to employ whole-cluster fermentations Down Under. "I thought, let's get some Shiraz and see what happens in Australia when you use whole clusters," he says. "I was reinventing the wheel. I later learned [that method] used to be traditional here."

Once back in Australia, Mills fell for the red wines he tasted from Yarra Valley and other cool-climate wine regions around Melbourne, and started Jamsheed in 2003. He bought grapes from vineyards he liked and vinified them at friends' wineries. He now leases winemaking space at Yering Station, a large corporate winery in Yarra Valley. —H.S.

- 94 JAMSHEED Syrah Beechworth 2012 \$70 300 cases
93 JAMSHEED Syrah Yarra Valley Yarra Glen 2012 \$70 275 cases

Ochota Barrels

Heady aromas of fresh blueberries and floral spices waft from a 2.5-ton bin of fermenting Shiraz when Taras Ochota pulls the canvas away to reveal the bubbling purple mass. Although he focuses on the South Australia staples of Shiraz and Grenache, he prefers a lighter style than is typical in Australia.

The reds concentrate on freshness and open textures, picking up black pepper, tea leaf, green olive and red berry notes that are more associated with cool-climate sources than with the warmer Clarendon Hills, McLaren Vale and Barossa vineyards that provide the raw materials for Ochota's wines. This stylistic choice falls in line with a younger generation of boundary-pushing Australian winemakers. But Ochota (pronounced o-ko-ta) shrugs off the idea that his wines are part of a trend. "It's what I like to drink," he says.

Ochota, who owns no vineyards, works with a small roster of growers. Even in 2013, a tough year for refreshing styles, his Barossa Syrah is a revelation—fresh and vibrant rather than spicy and rich. The bottling from Adelaide Hills, a cooler region, weaves black pepper nuances into fresh currant flavors on a sleek structure. "I learned enough to make educated decisions about what to risk," Ochota says. "I learned to find the right vineyards and trust my palate." —H.S.

- 91 OCHOTA BARRELS Grenache-Syrah \$40 600 cases
McLaren Vale The Green Room 2013
91 OCHOTA BARRELS Syrah Barossa Valley \$70 140 cases
The Shellac Vineyard Roennfeldt Road Marananga 2013



Taras Ochota with his wife, Amber, and son Sage

Torbreck

Torbreck made headlines late last year when owner Pete Kight, the American entrepreneur who started CheckFree and also owns Quivir Winery in Sonoma County, did not renew the contract of charismatic founder Dave Powell, who since selling the winery in 2003 had stayed on as Torbreck's manager and ambassador.

Kight, who purchased the company in 2008, handed the reins to longtime on-site winemaker Craig Isbel. According to Kight, Torbreck future lies in its four estate vineyards, totaling 150 acres, and its long-term contracts with growers. Most of them are on Barossa's western slopes, which yield powerful wines with more finesse than those produced in warmer parts of the valley.

As we tasted through the signature wines from 2012 at the winery, Isbel said, "I'm aiming to get the wines to show more purity and natural energy than they have in the past." Kight believes the young wines exhibit a profile that will appeal to longtime fans and also draw new ones. "There are global brands that started with big personalities," he says, referring to Powell, "but grew into entities in which the product was the personality. We just have to deliver on the wines." —H.S.

- 92 TORBRECK The Steading Barossa Valley 2010 \$38 400 cases
93 TORBRECK Cuvee Juveniles Barossa Valley 2012 \$22 1,500 cases