



TEXT NICK RYAN

# Reds with Attitude

Brace yourself for some punk-inspired wines, two distinct shirazes – both making big impressions, and a touriga tempranillo from one of Australia's top winemakers.

## OCHOTA BARRELS

Conversations you don't hear at marketing school:

*Winemaker: Can you drop those picking bins at the vineyard?*

*Winemaker's wife: Which vineyard?*

*Winemaker: The old-vine grenache vineyard.*

*Winemaker's wife: Which one's that again?*

*Winemaker: The one where we had Fugazi blasting on the car stereo.*

*Together: Hang on – that's what we'll call the wine! The Fugazi Vineyard.*

Despite naming a wine after a relatively obscure post-hardcore punk band from Washington DC, Taras Ochota is actually a

quiet and thoughtful winemaker. In a career more than occasionally interrupted by surfing safaris he has usually played a low-key role, the enigmatic bass player rather than the screaming front man. He's had stints at Nepenthe and Two Hands, worked several American vintages and been a flying winemaker producing drops in Sardinia and Puglia for a Swedish importer. These days he's working alongside Peter Leske running the old Nepenthe winery in the Adelaide Hills as a contract winemaking facility.

While there's no doubting he's a safe pair of hands steering someone else's ship, the strong creative streak that runs deep through

Ochota was always going to break through the surface somewhere. That somewhere is Ochota Barrels, the label he releases with his wife Amber.

The 2010 Ochota Barrels The Fugazi Vineyard Grenache (A\$35) comes from a site straddling the ridge between Blewitt Springs and the Onkaparinga River Gorge in the higher eastern part of McLaren Vale, and is a wine that could only have been made by someone who really understands the variety. It shows the soulful, savoury side to grenache that can be coaxed out with a bit of care and dedication. Fruit aromas are in the red berry realm, a few cherries and quandongs in there too. Then the hairier, scruffier bass notes kick in delivering reminders of the smokehouse and the freshly ploughed paddock.

Ochota is especially focused on the texture of his wines and it's in the mouth that this really sings. The wine is taut and toned with a supple core of juicy, fresh fruit in the mid-palate that tapers effortlessly into a sustained and finely textured finish.

The winery is doubling its offering this vintage, with the addition of the 2010 Ochota Barrels The Shellac Vineyard Syrah (A\$50) from Roennfeldt Road in the north western Barossan commune of Marananga. While the name may be continuing in the hardcore vein – Shellac is an even more obscure punk band – the wine is as far removed from the belligerence and bombast of the music as could be imagined.

Ochota had experience with the vineyard when the directive was to pick it very ripe, but when he was able to negotiate a small bit for himself he took it off much earlier than anyone else. The result is a meaty, beardy, dust on its boots kind of wine that still offers recognisable regional character. Black and blue fruit characters are underpinned with a



bit of cordite and shale. A healthy percentage of whole bunches brings another dimension texturally and the wine is lithe, linear and finishes with really tightly woven, faintly dusty tannins. It's a regional portrait drawn in fine lines rather than heavily daubed paint and compelling proof that Ochota is a man capable of making us look at what we think we already know in a surprising new way.

## DE IULIIS STEVEN VINEYARD SHIRAZ

Mike De Iuliis has been a major player in the rise of the new Hunter, one of the leading lights in a generation of younger winemakers who have redefined the region and its wines. His drops have always been impressive, but now that he has access to one of the Hunter's best vineyards he's taken it to another level.

The 7.5-hectare Steven vineyard was planted in Pokolbin by Lindemans in 1968. It was sold by Fosters in 2000 and snapped up by the Roche family who made some impressive wines from the vineyard with the help of Sarah-Kate Dineen before deciding to get out of the wine business and lease the vineyard to De Iuliis. Fruit from the vineyard has made its way into De Iuliis wines since 2006 but the 2009 De Iuliis Steven Vineyard Shiraz (A\$40) is the first release to declare its origins.

## Bright red berries, woody spices, grilled meat and Dutch licorice all waft from the glass.

This is archetypal modern Hunter shiraz: juicy, with softly sweet red fruit, licorice and fecund earth. There's a subtle spiciness woven right through it too.

What I really love about this wine is its lightness of touch. It packs plenty of flavour into a proudly middle-weight wine, a vinous Sugar Ray Robinson, perfectly balanced, not an ounce of extraneous fat and proof that knockouts can be delivered with deft skill and pure natural talent just as convincingly as with brute force.

## CLARENDON HILLS DOMAINE CLARENDON SYRAH

I have to admit to sometimes struggling to see what others do in the lauded Astralis shiraz from Clarendon Hills, which makes my reaction to the first release of this 2009

Clarendon Hills Domaine Clarendon Syrah (A\$57) as pleasing as it is surprising. While most of the Clarendon Hills output has historically headed straight to the US, Domaine Clarendon is being produced only for the Australian market. Pragmatic patriotism maybe, but I'm pleased nonetheless.

There is shared DNA between this wine and the heavy hitting Astralis with cuttings from that venerated vineyard transplanted to a bony, schist, elevated site overlooking the Onkaparinga River Gorge at Clarendon. In the words of winemaker Roman Bratasiuk, "zero topsoil – all rocks". The result is a vibrant expression of shiraz shot through with a profound and forthright minerality, exotic and aromatically lifted black fruit wafting over bedrock of schist and slate. It's beautifully supple and juicy in the mouth, impressively long and persistent.

It may not have the lofty price tag or international fan club that its big sibling does but for me it's a more satisfying wine.

## S C PANNELL TOURIGA TEMPRANILLO

If I was an under-appreciated variety like touriga trying to make my way in a big, harsh world then I'd be hoping to have someone with the masterful touch of Steve Pannell in

my corner. He's a man who couldn't make a bad wine if he tried.

After a couple of vintages blending these two Iberian varieties, the 2009 S C Pannell Touriga Tempranillo (A\$27) is the best example yet of this swarthy union. Black plum skins and some bright red berries, woody spices, grilled meat and Dutch licorice all waft from the glass. In the mouth sweetly supple fruit slides easily into savouriness and firm, grippy tannins tighten the wine decisively through a long, sustained finish. This is rusticity and earthiness with a bit of Pannell spit and polish, assured, confident and stylish.

If you think touriga is only good fortified, and tempranillo in Australia has yet to float your boat then this is the wine that will break down those pre-conceptions before the first glass is drained.



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