



Welcome to the CellarHand newsletter for May 2021. Here's a little taste of what's going on this month...

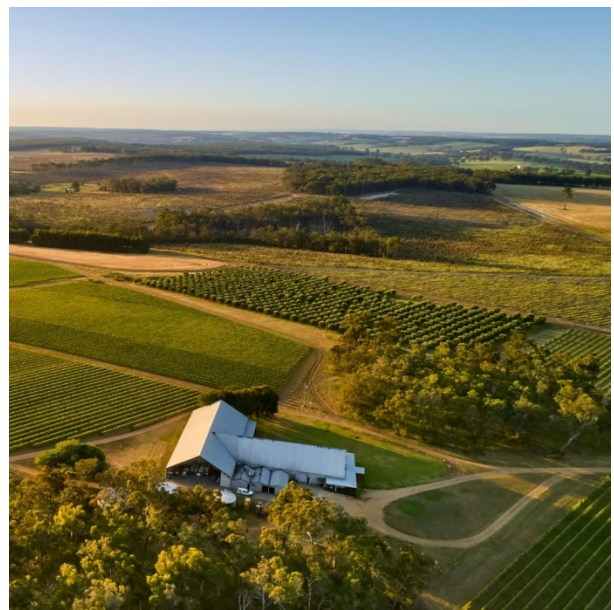
NEW

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NEWS

SMITH CULLAM CLIMAX

The career-best form continues for Frankland Estate. The Smith Cullam clan - led these days by Hunter and Lizzie Smith plus Lizzie's winemaker husband Brian Kent - followed up their Trevor Mast Trophy-winning 2017 Syrah with a benchmark-setting pair of '18s: Isolation Ridge and SmithCullam (the latter a large-format barrel selection of the former). 2019 was the best of these past vintages for Syrah, and here comes another raising of the bar. The Riesling release, meanwhile, comes after the 2019 Isolation Ridge took out last year's **WA Good Wine Guide** top award as **Wine of the Year**. Unquestionable quality issued forth from 2020, too, but sadly the same can't be said for quantity; this was the lowest yield on record for the single-vineyard wines.



Rounding out this release is Olmo's Reward, another unmistakable signature from the estate. "Different. Expressive. And very lovely," was **Gary Walsh's** conclusion. You could hardly find more apt words to sum up the exceptional Frankland Estate.

2020 Frankland Estate Poison Hill Riesling RRP \$45

*Strong lime and citrus blossom aromas, very pure, quite foggy but perfumed approach. Succulent and delicious, straight up. Lime juice, green apple, a lick of barely there grapefruit pithy here. Tangerine to finish. And minerally. Strong minerally finish, indeed. Tickles with its detail, filigree and stippled texture at once. Magic wine. 95 points. **Mike Bennie, The Wine Front***

***2020 Frankland Estate Isolation Ridge Riesling RRP \$45**

Superb, energetic, taut and very complex white wine. Scents of ozone and green apple, fennel and talc. Beautiful perfume that reflects perfectly into flavours in the palate, a shimmering, glassy and tense feel

drawn long and to a powdery, lightly puckering and, again, talc-like lingering finish. Epic. 96 points. Mike Bennie, The Wine Front

2019 Frankland Estate SmithCullam Riesling RRP \$63

With striking clarity and purity, this is the sort of Riesling you can get lost in, merely by breathing in the aromas of fresh sliced limes, white peaches and grapefruit, as well as nuances of white flowers, gun flint and spice. The palate has a similarly complete and composed style, leading you along with pristine lime, apple, white-peach and fresh-pear flavours. Long and effortless, this is all so pleasurable. From organically grown grapes. Drink or hold. Screw cap. 96 points. Nick Stock, JamesSuckling.com

2019 Frankland Estate Isolation Ridge Syrah RRP \$45

Bright, deep purple colour, with a fresh and spicy aroma of cool-grown shiraz, the fruit doing all of the talking. White pepper, blue fruits, violets, dried herbs. The wine is elegant but full-bodied, the tannins tightly coiled and supple, a gloriously aromatic, elegant cool-grown Shiraz. 95 points. Huon Hooke, The

Real Review

2019 Frankland Estate SmithCullam Syrah RRP \$118

Deep, bright purple/red colour, the bouquet shows violets, cranberry and blueberry, with meaty spicy overtones, and a note of bunched 'forest floor' adding extra interest. The wine is very intense, full-bodied but elegantly styled, with tremendous length and balance. Wow, this is impressive cool-climate shiraz: spicy but ripe and powerful in its relatively understated way. 97 points. Huon Hooke, The Real Review

2018 Frankland Estate Olmo's Reward RRP \$84

Pretty smelling wine with redcurrant jelly, blackcurrant, flowers, sweet tobacco, cedar and spice. Medium-bodied, succulent yet savoury too, with firm chocolaty tannin, fresh and lively, a little bit of mint in here, but also the perfume of dried roses. Finish is long with a slick of slate-like tannin. Different. Expressive. And very lovely. 94+ points. Gary Walsh, The Wine Front



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BURN COTTAGE COMES OF AGE

Every Burn Cottage release is a landmark. This estate strutted onto the Central Otago stage with such style and swagger in the late noughties that it immediately made a mark. It was also so respectful of nature and place that it was championed by its peers. It was more start-up than upstart, with characterful hard-rocking American Marquis Sauvage as visionary owner, a guru-like vineyard architect in Ted Lemon, and biodynamic viticulture as its cutting-edge tech.

By vintage 2018, it has well and truly come of age. The single-vineyard wine off the home block has 10 harvests on the clock, and never once missed a beat. That same wine has been in the **New Zealand Fine Wines** classification since the inception of this vinous hall



of fame. A white blend from the same site has been adopted and fine-tuned. And, for the first time, Moonlight Race is a 100% estate-grown wine.

What made this last point possible was the acquisition, a few years back, of the Sauvage Vineyard in Bannockburn. Located on Felton Road – New Zealand’s most-prized Pinot address – the 1999-planted site had previously been organically farmed and was immediately in conversion to biodynamics, along with its Cromwell sibling. A single-vineyard will follow in due course.

The gentleman for whom the Sauvage Vineyard is named was initially impatient for his Burn Cottage Vineyard to bear fruit. That land has since repaid his faith many times over with a string of stirring Pinot Noir wines. Marquis and his winemaking team, led by shrewd Central native Claire Mulholland, have shown similar restraint in letting the other pieces of their spellbinding jigsaw fall into place.

It feels somewhat momentous that this has now happened. We’re thrilled to bring this most complete Burn Cottage offer to you. Please note that the wines are scarce and therefore arrive with urgency and additional small print. However, CellarHand and the Burn Cottage team hope you’ll look forward to tasting and sharing these latest compositions from this inimitable estate.

2017 Burn Cottage Riesling / Grüner Veltliner RRP \$69

Such character! Lime cordial, dusty spices, peach, white flowers, thyme etc. It’s juicy and just off dry, intensity of flavour almost like a Starburst, with a fine chalky texture, crushed rocks kind of thing, some preserved lemon tang and gentle bitterness, a bit savoury too, and very long. It’s compelling and fun at once. Good now, probably later too, but kind of hard to resist. 95 points. Gary Walsh, The Wine Front

2018 Burn Cottage Moonlight Race Pinot Noir RRP \$69



Rarely is a Pinot Noir from Central Otago so supple, delicious and easy to drink as this little number. Cherry and squishy berries, dried herb and plenty of spice, a little fresh mint and rose perfume. Tannin is fleshy and plentiful, yet soft and gently mouth-coating. Finish is all spice and strawberry with a subtle meaty character, leaving emery board tannin in its wake. Love it. Great drinking now. 95 points. Gary Walsh, The Wine Front

2018 Burn Cottage Pinot Noir RRP \$92

This is a very attractive and gently complex pinot that sits in a red-cherry and red-plum zone, laced with spicy, gently herbal and floral elements, too. The palate has a very composed, fresh red-cherry centre with spice and light peppery nuances. Plenty of bright acidity lifts the finish. So fresh. Drink or hold. 95

points. Nick Stock, jameessuckling.com

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SOLAR PANNELL

Stephen Pannell is a champion in many ways. He’s won just about every accolade going – Bushing Trophies, Jimmy Watsons, Winemaker of the Year titles, etc. And he’s also a champion of climate change-proof grapes – varieties that love the sun, cope without rain, and look refreshingly bloody awesome grown in our warm Aussie soils.

A raft of new releases has just rolled in from Steve, running the Mediterranean gamut from Portugal

through Spain to Sicily and Campania in Italy. As you'd expect, they're all fresh and varietally expressive, with the reds replete with detail, shapeliness and generously apt grape tannins.

2019 S.C. Pannell Árido Grenache Rosé RRP \$28
Beautifully floral, this is full of delicious peach and light strawberry aromas and flavors. The texture is succulent and draws plenty of bright red fruit on the finish. So well balanced. Drink now. Screw cap. 92 points. Nick Stock, jameessuckling.com

2020 S.C. Pannell Nero Diavola RRP \$29

The grapes grow on 20 rows at our Olivers Road home, McLaren Vale. Hand-picked and traditionally vinified in a small open-top fermenter for 14 days. Gently pressed and sent immediately to a 2800-litre French oak vat and three puncheons for malolactic conversion and maturation for four months. Racked once and returned to vat and puncheons for a further seven months. A tempting and delicious feast of aromas and flavours including boysenberry, satsuma plum and blood orange. It's medium-bodied with subtle tannins that slowly make their presence known, layered with fruit.
- Stephen Pannell

2018 S.C. Pannell Tempranillo Touriga RRP \$32

Sometimes, partnerships just work and sync immediately. Like these two Iberian varieties. Comfortable together, complementing the qualities of each to make an harmonious drink. Dark fruits, red and black licorice, roasted coffee beans, wood char and charcuterie, sarsaparilla and nutmeg. Medium-bodied, energetic and damn delicious. 95 points. Jane Faulkner, Halliday Wine Companion 2021

2019 S.C. Pannell Aglianico RRP \$40

A grape that I love as much as Grenache. Almost. Not in terms of its pinosity melded with Mediterranean accents, but because of its unbridled ferruginous structure and Neapolitan air. Think Diego Maradona in his prime. Bitter chocolate, cherry pith and amaro riffs. But the defining aspect is the long, thirst-slaking bind of palate-defining, tannic architecture. Australia has not traditionally done this. And here it is! Why were we not planting this 100 years ago? 95 points. Ned Goodwin MW, Halliday Wine Companion 2021

2018 S.C. Pannell 'The Vale' Shiraz Grenache RRP \$40

A 51% Shiraz (Koomilya) and 49% Grenache from 45-year-old bush vines grown in the region once commonly known as Seaview. Puncheons and 2800L French oak vats. Dark berries and raspberry, saline with some orange and dried floral notes. Plenty of nourishing tannin here built into a chocolate and ferrous flavour base. Nutty too, with a dried seaweed character on a long firm finish. Beautifully made, and appropriately named. 94 points. Gary Walsh, The Wine Front

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POKER DOTT.

Arguably the most innovative grape project in Australian is back! The Chalmers family's Dott. series is itself a metamorphosis of the #bucketwine trials. Dott. began with a set of three wines from varieties making their "commercial" – if such tiny-batch craftsmanship qualifies as such – debut from the 2017 vintage. The grapes were Malvasia Istriana, Pavana and Schioppettino.





The second coming comprises those three wines in their 2018 incarnation, as well as the first release of Ribolla Gialla from the 2020 harvest.

To recap, this was inspired by the late Dr. (= Dottore = Dott.) Rod Bonfiglioli, a passionate, eccentric scientist whose dogged determination and visionary foresight brought so much colour, interest and integrity to Australian wine. He sought out these rare grapes for the Chalmers' collection, seeing their promise long before the family did.

This is the family's way of honouring that vision and sharing with the nation's wine-lovers the wonder of discovery that Dr. Rod shared with them.

The fruit is grown in the inland dry climate and red, mineral rich soils of the Chalmers Vineyard in northern Heathcote. The wines are then realised, hands-off in micro lots, by Tennille Chalmers and sister Kim's husband Bart van Olphen at the winery in Merbein.

If you're looking for something pure, personal and fresh - in the most utterly original sense of the word - then dash to Dott.!

2020 Chalmers Dott. Ribolla Gialla RRP \$29

Ribolla Gialla, or Ribuele as it is now known in Italy, hails from Friuli. It's the basis of a few cult wines coming from the area along the Slovenian border where it is often made on skins and sometimes in amphorae by winemakers who've inspired the recent growth of the natural wine movement. In other parts of Friuli it's made as a crisp, clean and somewhat aromatic white wine along with, more recently, sparkling wines - piggy-backing on the success of neighbouring Veneto's Prosecco.

Unlike the other Dott. varieties, Ribolla Gialla is a more recent import by the Chalmers family. Arriving out of quarantine in 2015. The reason it's found its way into the range inspired by Dr Rod is that we applied lateral thinking in the decision to plant this grape at our northern Heathcote vineyard - a far cry from the climate conditions of Friuli. Being a thin-skinned grape, somewhat prone to botrytis, we figured the relatively dry and well-ventilated site would be a bonus. Also Ribolla has high natural acidity and ripens at lower sugar levels, another couple of great benefits for wine quality when growing in warmer areas.

Dott. Ribolla was hand-picked on 21st February, chilled overnight and whole bunch-pressed into stainless steel for a cool, natural fermentation on fine solids with no acid adjustment required. After maturation on fine lees in stainless steel it was hand-bottled, unfinned and unfiltered, on site at Merbein in October 2020.

2020 Dott. Ribolla is pale lemon in the glass with aromas of feijoa, cucumber and botanicals. The palate hints at lime and toasted hazelnuts. While introducing itself as delicate, it's more textural than you would imagine, with a pleasant phenolic grip more often associated with weightier wines. - **Kim Chalmers**

Nutty, textural, floral and refreshing. Dry style but great fun to drink. Grapefruit here too. Citrus rind. Definitely recommend this. Joy to be had here. 90 points. Campbell Mattinson, The Wine Front

2018 Chalmers Dott. Malvasia Istriana RRP \$29

Considered the finest quality member of the vast Malvasia family, Malvasia Istriana hails from Friuli where it makes fine, elegant, aromatic and mineral wines. It is mainly grown on clay/lime soils at low elevation in Friuli but it is said to produce the best results in the free-draining gravelly plains of Friuli

Grave or on harder hillside sites where the variety's natural vigour is tamed.

Chalmers introduced a selection of Malvasia Istriana to Australia in the late 1990s, at about the same time that Bruce and Jenni Chalmers were enjoying wines from the grape with Dr. Rod and Stefano de Pieri at his restaurant and dreaming up a revolution in Australian wine. The first table wine was made from this clone by the Chalmers family in 2005; a passito dessert wine followed in 2009. After more encouraging results from the grape in the 2013 #bucketwine project Chalmers decided to plant Bonfiglioli block because it focuses on six north eastern Italian varieties which are a deviation from the mostly Mediterranean flavour of the Chalmers vineyard to date.

Dott. Malvasia Istriana was hand-picked, chilled overnight and whole bunch-pressed into stainless steel for a cool, natural fermentation on fine solids. After a short maturation in stainless steel it was hand bottled on site at Merbein in the late winter.

2018 Malvasia Istriana is golden straw coloured and has delicate spiced apple, lemon and hay aromas with a crisp, mineral palate of fresh cut red apple, fine structure and pleasant acidity. – **Kim Chalmers**

2017 Chalmers Dott. Malvasia Istriana **MAGNUM RRP \$94**

Clean and fresh; there's a tactile quality to the wine that's interesting: a type of powdery phenolics that will stand up to whatever food you care to match with it. 89 points. James Halliday, Halliday Wine Companion 2019

2018 Chalmers Dott. Pavana RRP \$29

The rarest grape in the Chalmers collection, Pavana caught Dr. Rod's attention during a mid-1990s tenure at Udine University. Only a handful of Pavana vineyards now remain in Italy, mostly in Valsugana which bridges Trentino and Veneto, but it was once widely planted in these areas when the region was part of Austria, where much of the Pavana wine was consumed. Being a pale, perfumed and herbal light red it wasn't favoured by the Italian's once the region passed to Italian rule so Pavana became unviable and was removed from most vineyards.

Pavana joined the Chalmers collection in 2000 but the first pretty, rosé-like super light red wines weren't made from the nursery block until 2013-2015. The combination of the variety with the distinctive Heathcote soil influence has produced a more structured and darker wine, still retaining the charm and freshness so endearing in the project wines. The fact that this variety was singled out by Dr. Rod during the 1990s at a time when heavy, concentrated and oaked reds were in fashion is a testament to his foresight.

Dott Pavana was hand-picked on 28th February, chilled overnight then destemmed into an open fermenter for a whole-berry wild ferment. It was basket-pressed on 27th March and finished primary fermentation in stainless steel. After a nine-month maturation period in stainless steel it was hand-bottled on site at Merbein in February 2019.

The pretty, rich garnet-coloured 2018 Pavana has an intense fragrance of fresh wild raspberry, dried figs and Darjeeling tea leaves. The palate is vibrant with rhubarb, rosehip and geranium characters, plus a hint of that Heathcote cherry note, backed by a subtle tannin structure around a long acid line. – **Kim Chalmers**

2017 Chalmers Dott. Pavana RRP \$29

MAGNUM RRP \$94

The late Dr Rod Bonfiglioli was a visionary viticulturist who encouraged Australian winemakers and growers to plant more adventurous grape varieties, both in response to climate change and also to diversify our gastronomy. This wine is a tribute to him: "Dott." – the shortened form of "dottore" – refers to Dr Rod's passion for Italian varieties such as the rare red Pavana. It's now the only example of pavana made in Australia and it's gorgeous: light,



juicy, crunchy, with an intriguing sour cherry and scorched almond twist. Max Allen, The 20 best wines of 2019, Australian Financial Review

2018 Chalmers Dott. Schioppettino RRP \$29

Almost extinct in the early 20th Century, Schioppettino was lovingly revived in the 1970s and now flourishes mostly in Prepotto along the Judrio Valley close to the Slovenian border in the warm, temperate and rainy Colli Orientali del Friuli. The delicate variety is prized for its overt and distinctive white pepper and spice notes and firm but fine tannins.

On a 2015 trip to visit Rauscedo nursery, Tennille and I were in a restaurant in Cividale del Friuli when we were approached by the President of the Association of Schioppettino producers of Prepotto. He'd overheard us speaking about the grape in English. A wonderful and inspiring exchange ensued with the local experts fascinated to hear of Australian Schioppettino and giving hearty approval for the selection of the Heathcote site as 'perfect' terroir and climate for their beloved grape, which needs good air drainage, warm days, cool nights and mineral soils.

Dott. Schioppettino was hand-picked on the 13th March, chilled overnight then destemmed into an open fermenter for a whole-berry wild ferment. It was basket pressed on 2nd April into a combination of stainless steel and old French oak barrique. After a nine month maturation period it was hand-bottled on site at Merbein in February 2019.

The 2018 Schioppettino is bursting with white pepper and Dutch speculaas spice aromas with a hint of jasmine and woody notes. The medium-bodied palate reiterates the anise, cinnamon and cardamom spices with cedar oil, blackcurrant and Davidson plum flavours. These are supported by medium-grain tannins, giving a lingering, dry finish. – **Kim Chalmers**

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PIP REPLACEMENT

"As debut wines go, this takes the cake. It's a stunner." That was **The Wine Front's Campbell Mattinson** commenting on Pip Farr's curtain-raising Gippsland Pinot Noir. Eight vintages later, Pip seems to have turned her dual-Pinot label into something of a cult classic. And she's still taking the cake every time. The Farr family has long been happy to let their wines do the talking, and Pip seems to have taken this to new levels with a level of reticence that only highlights the eloquence of her wines. Her fans – and there are many – don't seem to care how low-profile their hero is. After all, there's character and detail to burn in the 2019 Gippsland and Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir.

"The wines are grown on exactly same vineyards as last year, and to keep with my consistent theme of showing the region and vineyard I have made these in a similar fashion to last year's," Pip tells us. "This also allows the vintage to show its differences, for those lucky enough to be drinking more than one vintage at one time!"

In other words, "Read into it what you will," she seems to say – justly confident you'll be wholly satisfied with what you see.

2019 Philippa Farr Gippsland Pinot Noir RRP \$58

The Gippsland wine is grown on a site with considerable vine age - almost 20 years - and is dominated by the MV6 clone. The vines are on a slight north-facing slope and are cooled from the Bass Strait winds that have proven also to wreak havoc in spring at the pivotal times of flowering.



Wild ferment, with 25-30% whole bunches to aid in the wine's structure and complexity. The slow take-off of the wild ferment allows the wine to sit on skins for close to three weeks. The wine is then pressed off to 30% new oak and racked twice off lees over an 18-month period in barrel. It then goes to bottle where it's allowed to settle for eight months.

These wines continue to show a dominant thread of spice and savouriness, complemented by cherries and vanilla notes with a vibrant, full red colour and a tint of purple. The palate has intense concentration of flavours with richness of tannins, while acidity gives drive to the wine's length. – Pip Farr

2019 Philippa Farr Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir RRP \$58

The Mornington Peninsula wine is grown on the same vineyard we've been working with for the last few years. With 20 years of age the site is hitting its straps. Predominantly clone 115, with some MV6 and 114. This vineyard is well protected and a consistently delivering southeast-facing slope, made up of rich red loam over coarse gravel.

Wild ferments, with 25-30% whole bunches to aid in the wine's structure and complexity. The slow take-off of the wild ferment allows the wine to sit on skins for close to three weeks. The wine is then pressed off to 30% new oak and racked twice off lees over an 18-month period in barrel. It then goes to bottle where it's allowed to settle for eight months.

The intense savoury, earthy, forest floor aromas lure you into a pretty, delicate and engaging Pinot Noir. The palate delivers fine tannins with toasty oak, smooth minerality and a fresh, fine-acid finish. - Pip Farr

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SCHIEFER FEVER

“Erstaunlich gut!” said **Vinum** editor-in-chief **Joel B. Payne** of the newly released 2018 Heymann-Löwenstein Schieferterrassen Riesling. Which I think means he liked it. Well, he definitely did, since he and his panel of judges awarded it the title of **Estate Wine of the Year**. As the estate Riesling is the “calling card” of an estate, Payne went on, “This honour says a lot about the other, even higher quality Rieslings of the house. Here the consumer can buy blind.”

We always wholeheartedly recommend investigating Schieferterrassen because it really is a window onto the heart and soul of Heymann-Löwenstein, sourced from premier-cru sites on its dizzyingly steep slate slopes. It therefore hums with the texture and energy of the grand-cru wines, each of which has an extra level of terroir personality.

In short, it's an epic range – and we urge you to dig deep into these 2018s!

2018 Heymann-Löwenstein Riesling Schieferterrassen RRP \$64

*The 2018 Riesling Schieferterrassen comes exclusively from the Winingen single vineyards Brückstück and Hamm. The wine displays a yeasty bouquet with a delicate, crystalline slate aroma and intense yet elegant and refined fruit. Fresh and pure on the palate, this is a linear, refined and clear dry Riesling with fine tannin grip and a very good, intense and stimulatingly salty finish. The wine is light to medium-bodied but has remarkable intensity. This is a stunning wine for such a warm and dry vintage. "The must weights weren't that high and the acidity not that low," says Sarah Löwenstein. Tasted at the domain in September 2020. 92 points. **Stephan Reinhardt, Wine Advocate***



2018 Heymann-Löwenstein Kirchberg Riesling Grosses Gewächs RRP \$89

Very peachy and concentrated on the nose with apple strudel and mango dessert. Mouth-filling and seemingly almost off-dry, but the ripe fruit is carried succinctly by mouthwatering acidity. Drink now. 93 points. Nick Stock, jamessuckling.com

2018 Heymann-Löwenstein Röttgen Riesling Grosses Gewächs RRP \$116

Stunning concentration and power to the nose, which is saturated in lemon curd, oyster shell, dried apple rind, lime cordial and dried cloves. Very long on the full-bodied palate with resounding intensity, but focussed, knife-edged acidity that keeps this mineral and taut throughout. Drink now or hold. 97 points. Nick Stock, jamessuckling.com

2018 Heymann-Löwenstein Uhlen Blaufüsser Lay Riesling Grosses Gewächs RRP \$125

Another very floral and fragrant bouquet here of dried honeysuckle, apricot dessert and candied papaya. Rich and supple, but vertical and pure, this is a full-bodied Riesling with lots of density and a pastry-like texture. Drink now. 95 points. Nick Stock, jamessuckling.com



2018 Heymann-Löwenstein Uhlen Roth Lay Riesling Grosses Gewächs RRP \$150

MAGNUM RRP \$306

Smoky and mysterious in the nose, this is the still point in the centre of the storm. Wonderful harmony on the substantial yet graceful palate, then an exciting touch of "bitterness" climbs out of the depths at the very long, austere mineral finish. A hint of butterscotch develops. Bottled after almost two years in cask on the lees. Drink or hold. 95 points. Nick Stock, jamessuckling.com

2017 Heymann-Löwenstein Uhlen Roth Lay Riesling Grosses Gewächs RRP \$150

MAGNUM RRP \$306

*Tasted as a sample ready to be bottled, the 2017 Uhlen R Terroir Roth Lay VDP Grosse Lage is fascinatingly wild and intense on the opening, with notes of iron, herbs and crushed stones. On the palate, this is a silky, crystalline, precise, intense and concentrated Roth Lay with a long, tight, intense, complex and very persistent dry finish. Highly promising. A mouth-filling yet precise and salty Roth Lay with warm, lush fruit and a coolish crystalline and flinty soul. This was filtered in early March and was set to be bottled at the end of March, about a week after my tasting on 20 March 2019. 95-97 points. **Stephan Reinhardt, Wine Advocate***

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NOAH'S ART

"Noah the Arkwright was a pioneering vigneron – and a cool-climate specialist," wrote **Marcus Best** in his recent **Gourmet Traveller WINE** magazine article. "When the floods receded, he planted vines on the slopes of Mt Ararat, made wine and fell down drunk, sprawled and naked."

So began more than 6,000 years of winemaking in what is now known as Armenia, and all of it beginning with the Areni grape. Best's article focuses on those "few trailblazers [who] are bringing those Armenian strains back to life."

One of them, of course, is CellarHand's own Zorik Gharibian of Zorah. Back when he worked in the fashion business, Zorik initially envisaged a small vineyard in Tuscany. But then he was struck by the endless possibilities in his homeland following Armenia's release from Soviet rule.

Best recalls Zorah's arrival on the international scene when the 2010 Zorah Karasi Areni Noir made the

top 10 (out of 4,000 entries) in **Bloomberg's Top Wines of 2012**, alongside Château Haut-Brion's '89 and DRC's '09 Romanée-Conti.

Nine vintages on from there, this cuvée goes from strength to strength. "The 2018 Zorah Karasi Areni Noir is a faithful and refined expression of the Areni variety, the Vayots Dzor terroir and the karas tradition: a quintessential celebration of Armenian winemaking," wrote [Best](#). "It is fermented in concrete vats using local native yeasts and aged for around 12 months in buried clay amphorae. Dark plum colour, black cherry, spiced aromas, light body and acid, with earthy, white-peppery forest fruit flavour."



2018 Zorah Karasi Areni Noir RRP \$64

Deeeelicious wine! Great tension and freshness with the light graininess of concrete providing a framework for the sweet red-cherry fruit that zings in the middle and isn't remotely sickly. High-toned aroma with massive energy. I wonder how this will age, but why do you need to? It's so gorgeous now. This would be very easy to drink without food. 17.5/20
Jancis Robinson, jancisrobinson.com

2018 Zorah Voski Voskèat Garandmak RRP \$64

Ancient indigenous varieties, archaeological evidence suggests that both Voskèat and Garandmak have been present in Armenia for millennia. Voskèat translates as "golden seed" and is considered queen of Armenia's grapes. It's a delicate, gold-coloured grape with small, compact, relatively thin-skinned berries and bunches in the shape of a cross. Garandmak means "fat tail" and is one of the most popular grapes. It's a much hardier variety, greenish yellow in colour, with larger, thicker-skinned berries and compact bunches.

Fermentation with indigenous yeasts occurs in large, temperature-controlled concrete vats which are left rough deliberately to favour micro-oxygenation. Ageing then continues in concrete vats for eleven months with a further six months in bottle.

Vibrant, juicy and layered with beautiful acidity that comes from the high altitudes. The floral and spicy notes give way to a full-bodied white and the final blend is like a symphony on one's palate. - **Antonio Antonini, Zorah**

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