

Hints of Burgundy in Hills garden of delights

If there's anything gardens have in common, it's the way we judge them, and appreciate them. It takes the visitor just a few seconds to decide whether the garden in question would be a nice place to, say, sit.

But vineyards are gardens whose fruit will sit in you should they seduce you suavely enough, so first impressions are vital.

My fondest memories of great drinks well enjoyed, are invariably linked to the beauty of their source and the intelligence with which it was devised, sited and structured. How it feels. Like the great Clos de Mesnil, for example, a chardonnay vineyard whose fruit goes into the exquisite Krug Champagne wine of the same name. With brilliant gallic verve, the village has been designed with a protecting wall. But all the houses are outside the wall; only the vineyard is within. Mmmm.

Louise Warner, whom I'd never met, called me a week back, suggesting I may like to taste a couple of new wines she'd had made from her own Mt Bera vineyard by Ben Jeanneret of Clare. Ben's an unusually sensitive winemaker with a deep reverence for the environment and its ecology, so I was immediately curious, especially when I learned the vineyard is at Cudlee Creek. Send in the wine!

As the accompanying review



thirst
Philip White

attempts to make clear in a dumb-founded manner, this pinot had flavours that took me straight to a suite of vineyards north of the village of Morey-St-Denis in Burgundy. It's complex, hearty pinot, just slightly rustic, and utterly delicious, and it'll grow more so with a few years of dungeon. The fact that it costs \$17.50 is even more confounding than its quality. If it had really come from Morey-St-Denis you could multiply that price by at least six.

If you'd like to taste another winemaker's version of the same fruit, you'll see it blended with other Hills fare in Peter Gago's formidable Penfold's Cellar Reserve Pinot: both Peter, and his colleagues at Foster's, are serious enthusiasts for Mt Bera grapes.

Accompanying that pinot was a cabernet – Mt Bera Adelaide Hills White Cabernet 2006, which is made



Mt Bera vineyard at Cudlee Creek. Inset: Clare winemaker Ben Jeanneret

after the old clairette style. Clairette was lighter red from Bordeaux, made to be consumed in the year of its vintage, back in the days when the preservative techniques and sulphur regimes were so primitive that stable red wine for the cellar was highly uncommon. From clairette came the English word,

claret, which the EU priggishly outlaws us from using.

This so-called "white" cabernet – it's actually a bit darker than most rosé – is scrumptious, too. It will cellar, if you must, and it's only \$16. Beautiful easy drinking red to have cool. I couldn't wait

to see the vineyard: 12 healthily perfumed hectares of haute coiffure vines spread over a couple of steep, protected gullies in rich red clays and loams. They're surrounded by partly cleared scrubby rises for grazing, and untouched forest, as cutely speckled and amusingly complex as any of Basil Hadley's

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my picks

witty jungle paintings, with their unnervingly human folds, crevices and swoopy curves behind the foliage.

Louise and her partner, Peter Hall, had come to Adelaide on other work when they found this lovely slice of the hills, which they began planting in 1997. Peter died after a short illness in 2003, leaving Louise understandably rattled, but determined to complete their plan.

"Yeah", she says with a resolve I would never doubt, "It hasn't all been easy, by any means, but I'm fairly pleased with our product range and the way it's all settling down. There are a few more hectares that aren't too steep to plant, but I'm in no hurry to do that.

"Foster's are happy with the fruit we sell them", Louise continues, "and I get along well with Ben. He seems very keen on my merlot, so we might do more with him."

Mt Bera offers four other reds, made at Classic McLaren: two merlots, a cabernet, and a blend of the two; all very stylish, polished works of serious gastronomic beauty at meagre prices.

There are no cellar sales facilities at Mt Bera, so you'll have to take my word about the beauty and amenity of the place. But if you want to judge these incredibly inexpensive wines, check the website: www.mtberavineyards.com.au



Mt Bera Adelaide Hills White Cabernet 2006

(\$16; 12% alcohol; screw cap; 93 points)

One of the nicest things I ever had in Hindley Street was a 10y.o. Houghton cabernet rosé, in Ceylon Hut. It was like clairette – Bordeaux made quick – as Billy Shakespaw sunk in the Boar's Head. That became claret, a word the EU now forbids us from using. But this proves we can still make it! Not white: darker than rosé, but not red: dry, with lemon, walnuts, Cherry Heering, medlar, kippers, war paint, lipstick, prosciutto, etc., and best had cool with heaps of that stuff.

www.mtberavineyards.com.au



Tiger's Tale Margaret River Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2006

(\$16; 12% alcohol; screw cap; 91 points)

There's a yellow '43 de Havilland Tiger Moth biplane tied to the lawn outside this winery. The marketing bumpf – there's a book, too – goes on and on about it, although it's been decommissioned, which in old mess ling would read rooted, or cactus, like we'd all be if the winemaker's Old Man had driven us 25,000 kays, London to Perth, without augering in, which he did in that poor old kite. I reckon he'd go on about it a fair bit over port, if you get my drift. Nice drink.

www.edwardsvineyard.com.au



Teusner The Riebke Ebenezer Road Shiraz 2005

(\$19; 14.5% alcohol; screw cap; 93 points)

Rare to get a red like this elegant brightness from a place like Ebenezer, north of Nuri, where most of the growers are led by God to grow very ripe, intense grapes and sell 'em to makers who make alcoholic, dense essences from them for enormous prices and Bob Parker Jr. This is scrumptious young wine at a snip of a price. It combines incredible blacksmithed iron and anthracite with a zippy dancing freshness most unusual among unirrigated Lutherans.

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Mt. Bera Cudlee Creek Adelaide Hills Pinot Noir 2005

(\$17.50; 13.5% alcohol; screw cap; 93 points)

I really wanted to say that this is like a young Grand Cru Morey-St-Denis from the limestone on the Chambolle-Musigny side, grown by a family which usually sells all its grapes, but – due to the unfortunate but foreseen malaise of one purchaser – suddenly ended up with a few left over, so Papa made it with some barrels from next door, and sells it from beneath the kitchen his daughter plans to occupy en route to her coup of the whole ancien family business. Bon!

www.mtberavineyards.com.au