

Queens Pinch Vineyard

At a time when we are seeing an ever-increasing number of new wine labels on the market, one wonders how bewildered consumers can find their way through the labyrinth and make sound decisions about what to buy, what to drink it with and how long to keep it to enjoy it at its best. Here is a new range from Mudgee, NSW, which has pinned its hopes on one vineyard and one grape variety, Cabernet Sauvignon, from which three lines are bottled. Neither the label nor a rather blank website credits a winemaker, but the enterprise is described as the Andrew Buchanan family vineyard and the north-facing block is located in Queens Pinch Road – whence the label – which is producing fruit of very good quality from low-yielding and, by my guess, mature vines.

In choosing a block growing only Cabernet, Buchanan has followed sound form: this variety does particularly well around Mudgee, regularly producing lovely wines with a fine fruit underlay and considerable longevity. His wines are all bottled under screw caps and the distinctive, if slightly arty, label shows an elegantly black-gloved hand pinching the tail off a large, gold Q. Queens Pinch offers a straight Cabernet Sauvignon, a Select Cabernet Sauvignon (in a taller and weightier bottle) and a Rosé, also made from Cabernet; all are elegant, lusciously fruity and splendid with good food. I have long believed that wine belongs with food (and vice versa), so my notes here are based on that belief

Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (13% alcohol). Distinguished by a brilliant vermilion colour, this opens with some ungenerous – almost bitter – aromas which disappear after half an hour or so, underlining the need to allow good wine time to breathe (a good hour, in my view) before it's ready to start work. Youngish though sweet oak slightly dominates the nose at this stage, but ripe berry fruit lies just behind – fruit which grows increasingly luscious and rich on the palate. Teamed with juicy steak, its oak/fruit complexity opened up nicely, while a very simple cheese platter revealed its versatility. A Tasmanian cheddar – always a sound test – elevated its slightly peppery, plum characters appealingly while my rather severe King Island blue (which I feared might overpower this young wine) paradoxically brought out its lovely blackberry flavours. Leaving half the bottle til the next night, for a rack of lamb with a bit of garlic and rosemary – safe enough in the cool Easter conditions at Mt Dandenong – it showed further breadth of character and greater length and depth of flavour. What's missing at this stage is the minty flavour often associated with the variety, although that might be more a Coonawarra phenomenon; I have to confess to being a peppery shiraz man, really. I'd want to see this again when it's four or five years old, by which time the oak/fruit integration will certainly be better established ... and I think it will still be very interesting as a ten-year-old or more.

Select Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 (13%). While still a juvenile, this is clearly the superior red of the stable, with its deep crimson colour and beautifully integrated aromas of dusty oak, blackcurrant and luscious berry fruits. Its palate is rich, intense and complex, with hints of licorice amid the berries, and it grew even more luscious and robust over a couple of hours, with a lingering, satisfying finish well worthy of its 'Select' labelling. It excelled with a rich *coq au vin*, where its superb fruit and lovely

subtle tannins shone; grilled lamb cutlets married confidently with its lightly peppery spices and the last glass had enough muscle and maturity to combat the Tasmanian cheddar with confidence. It drinks remarkably well now, even at this tender age, but if you can get your hands on any of this, try to keep them off it until it's at least five years old: you will be rewarded with a seriously good Cabernet of considerable finesse.

Rosé 2007 (11.3%). While its nose is very shy – just a nice grapey whiff with a subtle hint of mixed spice – this shows well everywhere else. The colour is a clean pink with plenty of tawny notes, suggesting that we've caught this at about the right time. I gave this a searching test, beginning with some grilled, Chinese-marinated chicken thighs with a gingery stir fry and the wine's spicy and fruity characters showed out beautifully, matching the dish quite robustly. Rosé is widely renowned as an accompaniment to egg-based dishes and this was no exception with a simple bacon and classic herb omelette and a plain salad; here it was the appealing fruit that led, showing increasing intensity as it went. It would also work very well with quiche, frittata or even poached chicken with a cream sauce. I also chanced to have a glass left for some ready-to-eat Gippsland Camembert with quince paste and the rosé rose happily to the occasion, revealing more complexity and richness than expected. In short, this is a very attractive, versatile rosé which I would drink pretty much immediately, although next Christmas wouldn't be out of the question.

Geoffrey Milne

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