

7 May 2015



WHAT CHAMPAGNE TO DRINK ON MOTHER'S DAY

by Tim White



Kate Laurie of Adelaide Hills' producer, Deviation Road, is making quite the mark. SUPPLIED

Many, many moons ago your correspondent entered the Vin de Champagne Award, lured by the grand prize of an all-expenses-paid, two-week excursion to the Champagne region with access to even the most difficult to penetrate cellars. I made it to the final, even identified one of the wines in the blind tasting line-up, although completely screwed up another to be honest (a rosé, which in part I didn't pick because of my colour-blindness). I didn't win.

No matter, the tasting experiences required – the palate training – to make a decent showing on finals day was most educational. Smell and taste the wine; don't judge it by the label. There's no other wine produced anywhere in the world which is so judged by the name on the bottle. The name champagne itself is enough to influence most buyers to purchase the original over a locally produced *méthode traditionnelle* (as they must be called), even if the contents of the bottle are inferior. And there are very, very many vin de champagne ordinaires.

So it was most pleasing, when talking and tasting with Kate Laurie of Adelaide Hills' producer, Deviation Road, that she is getting a great reception for her *cuvée prestige*, Beltana, an \$85 a bottle blanc de blancs (pure chardonnay in other words). It's going especially well in the Sydney market apparently where inbound tourists are interested in experiencing quality Australian sparkling wines.

And anyone with the inclination, and wherewithal, whether from home or abroad, should experience Deviation Road's '09 Beltana. It is one of the finest *méthodes* I've tasted from anywhere outside of Champagne, and superior to many a champagne to boot. So get a glass or two of Beltana under your belt before it disappears!

Kate and husband, Hamish, own and run Deviation Road, which is tiny when compared to most other specialist Australian sparkling wine producers. They make a high-quality range of still, table wines also from

their Adelaide Hills property, but it is their three sparkling wines – all made by the traditional method developed in Champagne – which are really exciting. In addition to the blanc de blancs Beltana, there's Loftia (see What to Drink), a vintage-date blend of 70 per cent pinot and 30 per cent chardonnay, and a lip-smacking, forest fruit pippy non-vintage rosé by the name of Altair (\$30).

Kate learnt her craft in Avize – in Champagne – she studied there for three years. "I found a job in a (Champagne) vineyard when I was 19," she tells me while we're assessing some of the 2015 base wines in her lab, a former milking shed, "So, I was a bit lucky."

MORE PLUCK THAN LUCK

But after a few minutes tasting and talking with her you know that luck has got nothing to do with it. This facility that she shares with other great sparkling winemakers, in being able to put together still, relatively neutral, base wines, together in a blend, to predict how they will smell and taste once bubble and flavour yeast has worked its magic over several years, is an incredible skill. A gift even.

She admits to still being nervous about the process (she put together the first Deviation Hill blend in 2008). "I agonise about this for six months. In a good year like this year, it's easy – I'm not going to become concerned that I'm making a drastic error. But vintages like this don't come along all the time."

Whatever the vintage presents her with she always 'tests her assumptions' something drilled into her by her father who established Stone Bridge in Manjimup, Western Australia, where she grew up. "From the age I could understand the words test and assumption," she explains. "My father taught me this. It's a good way for someone to become riddled with anxiety." Which is actually a rather good sparkling winemakers' joke.

One of the questions posed in the entrance exam to that Vin de Champagne Award competition I entered

all those years ago concerned 'the great women of Champagne' or somesuch. The women, such as Louise Pommery, Jeanne Krug, Lily Bollinger, and of course the internationally famous Veuve Clicquot, who've had such a profound impact in the rich history of Champagne.

Kate Laurie is already making quite a mark with her modest marque and I'll be chinking a glass or two of Deviation Road this Sunday (my first Mother's Day as a dad, so there's a fair bit of responsibility). We'll maybe open some Gembrook Hill and Veuve Fourny too, remembering it's about what is in the glass, not just the label.

WHAT TO DRINK: BUBBLES FOR THE DAY

Deviation Road Loftia Vintage Brut 2012

[Adelaide Hills, SA]

Green apple, just-ripe blackberry: like a baked apple filled with currants and dried spices.

Has sniff of edginess too: icy, wet rocks.

Plenty of pear and peel in the mouth, and zest, chew, and pips.

Mouth-aromas of pâtissiere's pastry, and a lingering mouthwatering finish.

94/100

(Diam sealed)

