



Philip White <http://drinkster.blogspot.com/>

# Cream of the crop

Ed Peter is rich, generous and thirsty, so he had a hundred mates over to his Kaesler winery in the Barossa for a bit of a guzzle last week.

Ed's a North American merchant banking type who lives in Singapore or Switzerland or somewhere. Or everywhere. There were hyper-stylish French, Canadians and Chinese there, none of whom looked like they'd had to turn right when they entered the planes which delivered them.

There were also a few Australians who looked far too wealthy to be in the wine business, including one easy-going bloke of about six-foot-eight who said, when I asked of his interests, "I'm a really big farmer", which seemed quite likely.

The sommeliers – I think there were eight – looked like king-hitters from a Jackie Chan movie. They'd flown from Hong Kong and Singapore; their boss was the suavest bescarved Bordelaise seen in the Barossa, M. Christophe Bourrie.

Ed climbed up a ladder in his cellar to welcome us. It was another of those cool events where nobody seemed required to make notes, especially when Ed suggested we should enjoy learning a little and relax, rather than taking everything too seriously. But he was dead serious about imploring us to take taxis. This plea was repeated on the little drinks card we were all handed with a 140-page book explaining in both French and English how to taste and appreciate the great wines of France.

"We wish to remind you that the consumption of alcohol is dangerous to health," read the disclaimer. "Enjoy these Grand Cru wines in moderation. During the evening you have the option to taste the wines without drinking. If you drive and are afraid that you may have consumed more than the legal limit, please ask us to call you a taxi."

Ed had brought in Ficofi to stage the tasting. Ficofi was founded in 1990 by Philippe Capdouze, a wine-loving MBA

Bottle of gold: The rare and expensive Château d'Yquem Premier Cru Classé Supérieur Sauternes 1996.  
Photo: Leo Davis



in finance from Université Dauphine/Paris IX. "Ficofi's aim is to create magical, emotional and unforgettable moments by using Grands Crus as a vehicle for the quality image," Philippe writes in his book. "Uniquely, we have but one target: companies, who make use of our expertise, for their public-relations events."

Ficofi opened about 70 wines on the night; Ed had added another table of a couple of dozen wildcat wonders from his personal cellar. "These are just a few that I really like to drink," he said.

Now this was a tasting of wines of a quality rarely seen together on Earth, let alone in

the Barossa. But what was most captivating was not so much the names on the bottles, but the size of the bastards. These were double-magnums (3 litres), jéroboams (4.5 litres), and methusalems (6 litres). Such bottles are rare and expensive at the best of times, but fill them with something like Château d'Yquem Premier Cru Classé Supérieur Sauternes 1996, and you're looking at something that rarely escapes its home cellar, and never does at anything less than the price of a small car.

As for the possibility of encountering a methusalem of Domaine de la Romanée Conti La Tâche Grand Cru Monopole

1988? "It is a sin to open this," Christophe was heard to utter as he drew the cork, "it should be saved for the children."

There were incredible delights there in abundance. Margaux, Palmer, Mouton Rothschild, Haut-Brion, Petrus, Angelus, Figeac, Corton-Charlemagne, Montrachet, Mersault, Chambertin, Echézaux, Musigny, Gevrey-Chambertin, La Landonne, La Mouline, La Turquie, La Chapelle ... those in the know will get my sickening drift.

The trick seemed to be to pick the less than perfect bottles: it became a game among the plonkpress to complain about the corky bottles, upon which they would be quietly withdrawn from their table. And there were several of these ... far too many, if I'd picked up the tab, which must have been in the hundreds of thousands.

"It's part of the collector's thrill," one fellow sagely told another as the ever-so-slightly soured La Tâche was quietly spirited away. "Select the bottle from your cellar, and wonder, as you carry it up the stairs, whether it will be good." Regular readers will appreciate that this is a concept which escapes me. If those precious dreadnoughts had been screw-capped, or fitted with Diam compound corks, or even crown seals, they would have been in near perfect nick.

Bugger Portugal and its friggin' cork.

Nevertheless, I swooned dangerously over Drouhin's Clos de Mouches 2005, the Faively Corton-Charlemagne 2004, and the Leroy Mersault 2000.

But the Rhone wines left me grasping most desperately at my sodden heart: the Chapoutier Barbe Rac Châteauneuf-du-Pape 1991, and Jaboulet's Domaine de Thalabert 1990 were simply spellbinding. Australia could learn much from these elegant exquisites.

The d'Yquem was the death knell. It was painfully beautiful. And it took a long, long time to drink, praise Bacchus and Pan.

Beach Road  
**Greco di Tufo**  
2009  
\$22  
**14% alcohol**  
Screw cap  
**91 points**

If you were about to launch a new brand in these nefarious times, this would be the way to do it. Import an ancient Greek variety from Tufo, in Campania, Italy, grow it fastidiously at Langhorne Creek, and make a bloody beautiful dry white from it, in this case the first in Australia. This has an alluring rustic aroma of wheaten straw and ancient stables, dried pineapple and pear, and a honey I can't quite place. Add lemon, and there's your flavour: deliciously dry and grainy, and perfect for shaved grano pecorino and hot cacciatora – from Marino's – with charred garfish and Sofia Loren.



Beach Road  
**Fiano**  
2009  
**13.5% alcohol**  
Screw cap  
**93 points**

Fiano's finally poking its flowery Italian head up here; this is easily the best yet. (Briony Hoare's bold new brand, bold new varieties, and bold new design by Em Shepherd shows textbook smarts.) This baby floods the table with wholesome, heady, musk perfume, and an overwhelming whiff of Bosc and Passet-crassagne pears, poaching gently in cider with cloves and nutmeg. Like the Greco, its dry, grainy tannins scream for hard pecorino grano and the sorts of things four generations would sit together to devour in a Campania farmyard, accordion on the spring

