

WineScores - ARTICLES

www.winescores.ca

By Daenna Van Mulligen, Accredited Sommelier



Australia - New South Wales

Posted - May 19 2009



The Graveyard Vineyard, Hunter Valley NSW

Located in the southeastern portion of the great island continent of Australia and home to the stunning harbour city of Sydney, is New South Wales. However, NSW is not necessarily, foremost in consideration of international wine drinkers. Yet it's here that the first vines, brought to Australia were planted, in Sydney, and it's also here, just two hours drive north, the historic Hunter Valley lies.

Hunter Valley became a wine region based on its proximity to Sydney – not due to its perfect growing conditions. A flat valley in the Brokenback Range (the coastal mountain range) Hunter Valley is, without question a beautiful destination and is a favorite weekend destination of Sydneysiders. Ironically, this is traditionally a mining region. And, there is a fairly obvious disparity between the perceived prestige of the wine industry (and those who travel to wine regions to enjoy the finer things in life) and the understated blue-collar locals.

Although its one of the warmest (and most humid) wine regions in Australia the significant amount of rain it receives falls during the growing/harvesting season - sometimes causes dire repercussions. I arrived just after the Semillon had been harvested in early February. That night the rain started and didn't let up. I heard it was still raining almost a week later.

BROKENWOOD



After being picked up by Brokenwood General Manager (and one of its 23 partners), Geoff Krieger in Sydney we drove north, into this verdant coastal range until we rolled into the town of Cessnock then continued north along Highway 82, also known as Wine Country Drive. By the time we passed the legendary Lovedale Vineyard there was no doubt we were in wine country as row upon row of vines painted the horizon.

Turning onto Broke Road, then MacDonald Road we made a brief stop in the Graveyard Vineyard to taste the berries before taking the back way into my first Hunter Valley stop, the highly acclaimed Brokenwood winery.

A combination of dance and reggae music was pounding out of the winery where a handful of young, Blundstone shod, apprentice winemakers from around the world labored on the 2009 vintage. Semillon was fermenting in stainless steel tanks and the presses were rolling out discarded Semillon skins into golden sheets.

I sat down with Chief Winemaker Iain "Riggsy" Riggs to taste a selection of what makes the Hunter Valley (and Brokenwood) famous – Semillon – plus a trio of Shirazes. Riggs is not only well-known but also very well respected winemaker and wine judge in Australia. He is also the successor to Len Evans as the Chairman of the Hunter Valley Wine Show and makes a mean Semillon. Working alongside Riggs is young Kiwi winemaker P.J. Charteris. P.J. seems to be the one who keeps an eye on the motley crew of winemaking trainees, he looks as though he could be one of them.

I spent the better part of morning with the Brokenwood team, until the lunch bell rang I sat down to a delicious, healthy, buffet-style lunch prepared by an in-house chef, specifically to feed the crew and keep their energy levels up.

Even better were the bottles of wine, shared around this picnic table with lunch – a tasty glass of wine with lunch – very civilized.

Brokenwood wines can be found in some markets in Canada.

Brokenwood Semillon, Hunter Valley, 2008 has creamy sweet citrus and gooseberry with snap peas, minerals and herbal tones. Taut, snappy acidity with loads of lemon/lime and zesty flavours.

Brokenwood Semillon Oakey Creek Vineyard, Hunter Valley, 2004 has interesting toasty, honey and brown sugar notes with undertones of minerals. The palate has a lovely rounded texture with lime citrus and honey flavours and a crisp, clean finish.

Brokenwood Semillon Stanley Park, Hunter Valley, 2007 has gorgeous, bright fruit – apple and pear, passion fruit and honey with lovely floral tones. On the palate it's a gorgeous balance of crisp and creamy with flavours of citrus, honeycomb and figs. Delicious

Brokenwood Semillon ILR Reserve, Hunter Valley, 2003 ILR stands for its maker... Ian Lesley Riggs. The aromas are smoky, sweet – caramelized figs, vanilla praline. It has ripe creamy fruit, citrus peel and toasty flavours on the palate - very elegant.

Brokenwood Semillon ILR Reserve, Hunter Valley, 1999 shows aromas of asparagus and honey, roasted figs, and honeycomb. Smooth and creamy on the entry with flavours of brown butter and sage and a long citrus finish – clean and bright.

Brokenwood Shiraz Hunter Valley, 2007 shows briary fruit, blackberries, dark chocolate and leather with hints of dill and green olive. It's somewhat austere on the palate with fine dusty tannins throughout, earthy, leathery hints and a dry finish.

Brokenwood Shiraz McLaren, Hunter, Beechworth, 2006 is primarily McLaren Vale fruit and presents sweet cherry, warm spice, crushed dark floral tones and hints of dried fruit. Great acidity on the palate with creamy plums, black cherries, dark chocolate shavings and fine, firm tannins.



Brokenwood Shiraz Graveyard Vineyard, Hunter Valley, 2006 is an elegant Shiraz from Brokenwood's darling, the Graveyard Vineyards next to the winery. This icon Shiraz shows primary cherry aromas followed with espresso and mixed berries. The palate is smooth with harnessed power, spice tobacco and leather. The tannins are ripe and the finish is bittersweet.

Brokenwood Shiraz Graveyard Vineyard, Hunter Valley, 1996 has youthful, bright berry/cherry aromas, leather and savoury/meaty tones with hints of celery salt. Like the 2006, old-world elegance is noticeable, complex with fine peppery spice and silky tannins.



Brokenwood trio - winemaker P.J. Charteris, Chief winemaker Iain Riggs, partner Geoff Krieger