

SA Tour Diaries...



EACH YEAR FOR THE LAST TEN, INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST - **RIC EINSTEIN** PRODUCER OF TORBWINE.COM VENTURES TO SOUTH AUSTRALIA ON AN EXTENSIVE TOUR OF THE WINE INDUSTRY.

A FAMOUS STRAIGHT SHOOTER AND IN THIS ARTICLE HE PULLS NO PUNCHES - **RIC EINSTEIN** - THE OPINIONATED RED BIGOT MEETS WITH THREE BOUTIQUE WINEMAKERS.

Ever heard of **Lazy Ballerina**? **James Hook** is the man behind this label and although I have tried a few of his wines, we had never met. He communicates fairly prolifically, and very well, from his website. From those communications I had a picture in my mind of what he would be like. I had pictured a short, thin, outgoing sort of chap, much like *Richard Hammond* from *Top Gear*. Boy was I wrong. Way off track with that one, James is a big fella and very quiet.

We met James at his new cellar door, so new it hasn't even been completed yet. We were his very first visitors. He is located on Brookman Rd Kuitpo, and although it's technically McLaren Vale, it could almost be the Adelaide Hills.

James didn't name his winery because he has a fetish for women frolicking in tutus and funny slippers, well least I don't think he does; it's actually the name of the vineyard

trellising system that acts like a solar panel to trap the maximum amount of sunlight. His vineyard hasn't been certified as organic yet, but he practices organic principles. It's only a matter of formality to gain certification.

By trade, James is a viticulturalist and consults to a number of wineries in the region. His list of customers includes some of the most respected names in McLaren Vale. In the early stages of our conversation with James one thing became immediately apparent. The guy is a perfectionist and pays an incredible amount of attention to detail. No half measures or shortcuts for him.



Des vins de la région de McLaren Vale, production artisanale de James Hook





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I HAD PICTURED A SHORT, THIN, OUTGOING SORT OF CHAP, MUCH LIKE RICHARD HAMMOND FROM TOP GEAR. BOY WAS I WRONG.

The Lazy Ballerina operation is a labour of love for James. When I asked him how much he was charging for his wine, he said, "My belief is to make my wine available at a good price. It's \$20. I know commercially that's silly."

More like bloody stupid. The wine is certainly worth significant more than a measly twenty bucks, but he is happy; his customers are delighted, and the wines sells out incredibly quickly, so who am I to argue.

HE IS SERIOUSLY SHORT - CHANGING HIMSELF.

HE SHOULD BE CHARGING AT LEAST \$21.

James was kind enough to open a sample of every wine he has made so I could get a complete picture on what he was aiming to achieve.



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Lazy Ballerina 2004 Shiraz is sealed under Procork and is a back vintage. The colour is incredible; it looks like a barrel sample. It was matured in 100% new oak; half American and half French. Fine, chewy, powdery tannins solidly frame the youthful, fresh acid and pure, intense, deep, pristine fruit. On the palate the wine is incredibly youthful and shows plum, savoury cherry, chocolate and menthol flavours that finish with fantastic intensity. They must have used the ramjet to cram so much flavour into the bottle. It's a muscular-weight with a firm consistency and intricate level of complexity. It has a rustic style and feel and is rated as Highly Recommended with **** for value.

Lazy Ballerina 2005 Shiraz is also a back vintage. The nose shows coffee oak with menthol and dark berry fruits. Fine, dusty tannins combine with the piquant acid and pure, deep, strong fruit to form a muscular-weight wine with a supple consistency, solid structure and an agreeable level of complexity. It's slightly lighter than the previous vintage but more refined, however I prefer the flavour profile of the 2004. It has a huge amount of flavour intensity but has a sappy mid-palate with prune and dark chocolate. Rated as Recommended with **** for value, drink from 2012 to 2016.

Lazy Ballerina 2006 Shiraz sells for \$20 and is sealed under Procork. The wine is as black as the ace of spades and the bouquet exhibits nose-clearing menthol. The chewy tannins are silky and drying and beautifully support and balance the strong, deep, pure, juicy fruit. The wine has a lovely mouth feel and a huge punch of flavour. Plum, black pepper and aniseed flavours harmonise into a minty finish. This muscular baby with mouth-coating tannins is the best of the three but needs time. Rated as Highly Recommended with ***** for value, and the rating should increase as the wine enters its peak drinking window between 2014 and 2022; this is sold out at the source, but there may be a little at retail, so don't delay.

Lazy Ballerina 2005 Shiraz Viognier sells for \$16 and is sealed under Procork. The bouquet is very ripe and in your face, there is nothing subtle about this black wine. It has a lovely mouth feel but there is something almost disjointed about it. The flavour profile does not mesh for me. It's a full-bodied wine with a supple consistency and whilst it has a lot going for it, the Viognier component is too noticeable. Rated as Agreeable with **** for value, it should last for some time.

Lazy Ballerina 2006 Shiraz Viognier sells for \$16 and is sealed under Procork. The Viognier was very noticeable on the bouquet but there was some black fruit below. This wine is better than the previous vintage showing less overt Viognier characters. The silky tannins combine with strong, pure fruit to form a full-bodied wine with a supple consistency and an agreeable complexity. It has a pleasant mouth feel with intense

plum, and aniseed and whilst it's attractive, there is nothing subtle about it, yet it seems to work. Rated as Recommended with **** for value, the rating should improve as the wine matures over the next few years.

The Shiraz wines are far better than the Shiraz Viognier wines. The value is absolutely sensational and if you are not on the mailing list, you should be.



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JAMES LIKES A GOOD PARTY, SO HE ASKED A COUPLE OF HIS MATES TO JOIN US AND BRING A FEW BOTTLES OF WINE WITH THEM. THE MORE THE MERRIER.

Have you ever heard of **Inkwell Wines**? That makes two of us. Inkwell is owned by a transplanted septic tank and his partner who owns a vineyard on California Road - Tatchilla. Given his accent, it is a fitting street name. They bought the property in 2003 and have been concentrating on getting the thirty acres of young vines into balance ever since. The vast majority of the crop is sold off to other producers.

Dudley Brown's philosophy is simple. If you take care of the vines, they will take care of you. They are currently cropping at about two tonnes to the acre, which is pretty low for young vines in this region. He feels there are two ways of achieving the right cropping yield in his vineyards. One is to control the water, the other is to get the pruning right.



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Inkwell 2004 Shiraz will sell for approximately \$30 when it is released and is sealed under screwcap. The nose is very spicy which leads to an attractive palate profile showing violets, spice and blackcurrant that has big punch of flavour. It's an ample-weight wine that is very tight and backed by dusty tannins and supported by crisp acid. It needs time. Rated as Recommended with *** for value, it should loosen up and enter its peak drinking window between 2012 and 2016.



Inkwell 2005 Shiraz is sealed under screwcap and has not been released yet. The bouquet showed spicy, coffee oak notes over clean fruit. The wine was made using reductive handling. This wine is nowhere near together yet it has all the right components in the right proportions. The fruit is pure, the acid is youthful and the tannins dusty. It's an ample-weight, firm and solid wine and has both better fruit and better oak than the 2004. The fruit is sweet but the flavour profile is savoury and finishes dry with cherry, plum, chocolate, aniseed and other black notes. Rated as Highly Recommended with **** for value (based on a possible price of \$30) the rating should improve as the wine enters its peak drinking window between 2013 and 2020. It's pretty smart stuff for the price.

Inkwell 2006 Rebel Shiraz is way off being released and is sealed under screwcap. The wine opened to reveal oak and slightly reductive notes, which should either blow off or be absorbed in time. The dusty tannins are unobtrusive but well and truly there and solidly back the pristine, pure fruit that is driving the wine. The fruit in this wine is better quality than the previous vintage but the previous vintage had a better flavour profile. It's in the black fruits spectrum with lots of aniseed. The complexity is well developed in the supple, ample-weight wine. Rated as Highly Recommended with **** for value, it should be in its peak drinking window between 2014 and 2022.

The work that Dudley is doing in the vineyards is paying dividends. The fruit is getting better as each season goes by. I just hope he resists the urge to increase the black attributes of the wine in the future. Too much of a good thing is not necessarily a good thing.

However, in an email exchange after the wines were tasted, as an aside, Dudley wrote, *"Dark fruit is what the gods (and*

drought stress) give us. We prune to balance, don't use nitrogen, pick sooner than all but 3-5 shiraz vineyards in McLaren Vale (out of many hundreds and in the 14's Baume) and never use more than 40% new oak – all top shelf French. Our goal is to express the site with the highest quality fruit we can grow and make the best we wine we can. The methods are the same in both pursuits – minimal intervention.

Like all fools' errands, we will always come up short of what we aim for.

Interestingly, the wine you like most was the ripest (highest sugar) we ever picked. It's a puzzle this business."

So, where-ja-geddit? Email [dudleyb\(at\)internode.on.net](mailto:dudleyb(at)internode.on.net)

“ALL SERIOUS WINE LOVERS SHOULD BE THANKFUL FOR THESE PRODUCERS, WHO GIVE US SUCH A WONDERFUL, DIVERSE RANGE OF WINE, MUCH OF WHICH IS WONDERFUL VALUE.”





The other friend that James invited to the party was **Paul Petagna** who is the winemaker for both **Sellicks Hill** wines and **Petagna Wines**. Paul has a 25 acre property and does all the vineyard work and the winemaking himself.

The vines range in age between five and ten years old. In the short space of time they have been going, the fruit has been sold to a number of respected wineries including Mitolo, Two Hands and Sparky Marquis. It is now primarily sold to Chapel Hill, and together with Dudley Brown's fruit, they form much of the backbone of Chapel Hill's relaunched The Vicar (now their top shelf Shiraz.)

Trying to get Paul's profile straight is not easy. He has more names on his business card than the average conman has aliases. Besides the two names already mentioned, Sellicks and Petagna, his card has the names Diavolo, Piombo and Valetta. It's busier than the casualty unit's nurses on Saturday night after a big football game. Total production is 1,000 dozen so it's a pretty small, boutique operation.

The vineyard is located at Sellicks Beach, almost right on the ocean. Like many good wine grape vineyards, the soil is poor. It's almost nonexistent. There is no topsoil, there is a little bit of red soil and then broken down quartz below.



Valetta 2005 Grenache Shiraz retails for of between \$25 and \$30 a bottle. The wine sits beautifully in the mouth. Although it's driven by deep, strong, persistent fruit and backed by crisp acid and dusty tannins it is well-balanced. Plum, rich chocolate and a spicy finish provide a good level of complexity in this solid, muscular-weight wine. It's approachable now but will soften and integrate further. Rated as Highly Recommended with *** for value, it should enter its peak drinking window between 2012 and 2017.

Piombo 2005 Shiraz sells for \$50 and the entire production of two hundred dozen is exported to the US; what a shame we don't get any locally. The bouquet is unyielding. The pure fruit is pristine and sensational, and with the fine, very tight tannins and fresh acid, nothing sticks out and the fruit is doing all the talking. And it's sweet talk at that! Red, blue, and black flavours are all interwoven in both sweet and off sweet layers. It's ample-weight and shows some elegance and should become seamless in time. The construction is harmonious and the wine is Rated as Highly Recommended with *** for value, but the rating should improve as the wine enters its peak drinking window in a few years time.

Petagna Wine 2005 Diavolo is a blend of 70% Shiraz and 30% cabernet, sells for \$40 and is sealed under cork. The bouquet shows coffee, chocolate and loads of spice but those characters are from the fruit rather than in oak, as only 20% new oak has been used. The pure, deep fruit is simply splendid and provides a striking flavour profile of mocha, milk chocolate, plum, spice and milky coffee flavours. The juicy-fruit is brilliantly matched to the fine, tight, chewy tannins that completely fill the mouth. This is in elegant, refined and classy wine that finishes with good length. It's also an excellent food wine and would be perfect with anti-pasta. Rated as Excellent with **** for value, it should enter its peak drinking window between 2012 and 2022. You godda get summa this one. Email paul(at)piombo.com.au. Only two hundred dozen have been produced.

That was a great little party. It just shows how well those boutique wines can be made and what wonderful value they can represent. In the scheme of things, the amount of wine these tiny boutique producers make is peanuts, but all serious wine lovers should be thankful for these producers, who give us such a wonderful, diverse range of wine, much of which is wonderful value. But then, their primary motivation for producing wine is the love of the grape, and whilst they do need to make a buck, return on shareholders funds is not the driving factor.

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