

## Why Ric Einstein likes Red...



**Ric Einstein is a New South Wales wine journalist best known for his website [www.torbwine.com](http://www.torbwine.com) and famous (or infamous) for his yearly travels through South Australian wineries. He recently tasted the line up at Red Heads Studio in McLaren Vale looking at the smaller side of the winemaking...**

On my first visit, 18 months ago, Red Heads hoped to be opened fairly soon, but due to the usual problems one can encounter with the local council and neighbours, they are still not open. At last most of the problems have been resolved, and I was told they should be opened by Christmas; the only problem was they didn't say which Christmas. When I was there the first time, the place looked like a combination of a bomb site and a construction site. On this visit, whilst some progress has been made, it still looks like it is need of some serious work.

For those that are not familiar with the concept behind this operation, it's brilliant. Take a bunch of talented winemakers, or even growers wishing to learn more about winemaking, and give them the freedom to do whatever they would like in an environment where experimentation and pushing the boundaries are encouraged. The underlying belief is that before real advances can be made in winemaking, new things must be tried, and whilst mistakes will be made, learning from these mistakes and a can-do attitude should result in some interesting wines, and hopefully improved winemaking skills.

At the Studio, the winemakers can use the facilities to produce small batches of wine and have a number of supportive peers who will be able

to assist with ideas, suggestions and encouragement. It's all about giving the opportunity to the winemakers, to do their own thing.

All this sounds very admirable and noble, but the studio has to make a profit. Luckily Red Heads are backed by Tony Laithwaite who is Britain's largest direct wine marketer and has been going for over 20 years. If it wasn't for this connection, the council delays probably would have meant the venture would have not got off the ground. Luckily, Tony has been able to absorb a lot of the produce and sell it in the UK.

Once the Studio gets up and running, it will sell two different ranges of wines. The Red Heads range will be the first, and a certain quantity of the wines that have been made by the independent wine makers will form the second range.

It is an exciting concept and one that should benefit not only the region, but assuming new techniques are discovered; it could benefit the whole Australian wine industry. Experimentation and innovation; it was this concept that was behind Morris O'Shea's legendary winemaking, as well as the basis of the formulation of Grange by Max Schubert.

On this occasion we were met by Adam Hooper of La Curio. The line-up of wines on the counter was impressive. This was certainly not going to be a dry argument.

**Satellite Gore 2005** is a very unusual blend of 31% Nebbiolo, 37% Cabernet and 21% Merlot; it retails for \$25 and is sealed under cork. The attractive, spicy nose shows excellent complexity. Loads of dusty tannins back the distinct fruit to form a medium-weight, sensation-ally-structured wine that is solid, firm and has a sophisticated complexity. Spice, chocolate, more spicy pepper, red and black fruit flavours flow across the palate with excellent length and finish dry. Maintaining some refinement, its structure is currently layered and when the fruit surfaces from below the tannins it should show more harmony. A great food wine, all those Oz wine bashers who say they are all the same should get their lips around this one. Rated as Highly Recommended with \*\*\*\* for value, it should hit its straps about 2010.

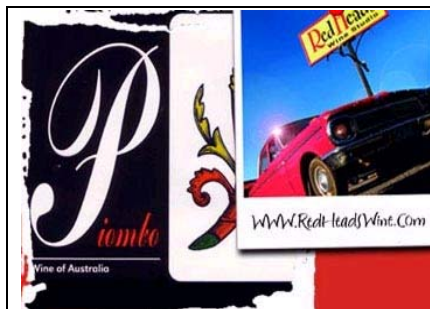


**La Curio 2005 The Nubile** is a blend of Grenache and Shiraz from McLaren Vale and was matured in half American and half French, aged oak; it sells for \$19 and is sealed under cork. Bottled only two weeks ago, the bouquet showed pleasant aromatics with peppery characters. Loads of powdery tannins currently dominate the fruit and whilst it needs time for the tannins to integrate, there is enough fruit to carry the load. Chocolate, blackberry, raspberry and pepper provide a diverse, but agreeable complexity that is both sweet and spicy. Medium-weight with a

supple consistency and solid structure the flavour profile is very interesting. Rated as Recommended with \*\*\* for value, drink from 2008.

**La Curio 2005 Reserve Bush Vine Grenache** is sourced from 80-year vines, sells for \$24 direct (or \$27 street price) and was matured in a hundred percent French oak. Sweet fruit is offset by spicy Christmas cake characters on the bouquet and leads to a palate that is musky, savoury, spicy, meaty, with raspberry flavours; it finishes long and very dry. Pure, deep, strong fruit combines with tight and chewy tannins to form a very well structured, ample-weight wine with a firm consistency and well-developed complexity. The finish is slightly warm and whilst it is angular at this stage, that is probably due to bottle shock. Rated as Recommended with \*\*\* for value, the rating should improve as the wine matures, and it is a solid, credible drop.

**La Curio 2005 Reserve McLaren Vale Shiraz** is sourced from five different blocks in the area; is sealed under cork and sells for \$28. Like a number of previous wines this had also just been bottled and although the bouquet was flat, it did show subtle spices and noticeable vanillin characters. Powdery tannins and deep fruit are perfectly balanced and produce a firm, solid and tightly structured wine that has some class. Black chocolate, coffee, nutmeg biscuits and sarsaparilla flavours completely fill the palate, and finish very long and persistent. This little bundle of joy needs time and is a must buy; rated as Highly Recommended with \*\*\*\* for value.



## Piombo 2004 Shiraz

*It sells for \$40 to \$50. The bouquet was reticent. Backed by pure, quality fruit, balanced acid and dusty tannins, this muscular-weight, firm and solid wine has a well-developed complexity; it is slightly rustic and old fashioned but certainly has character. Blackberry, chocolate, vanilla, and black pepper flavours finish long and persistent. Rated as Highly Recommended with \*\* for value (at \$50) according to some it can be found in the high \$30's which makes it much better value. As it is so tight, it needs time but certainly has loads of potential and should best be approached in 2012 and beyond.*





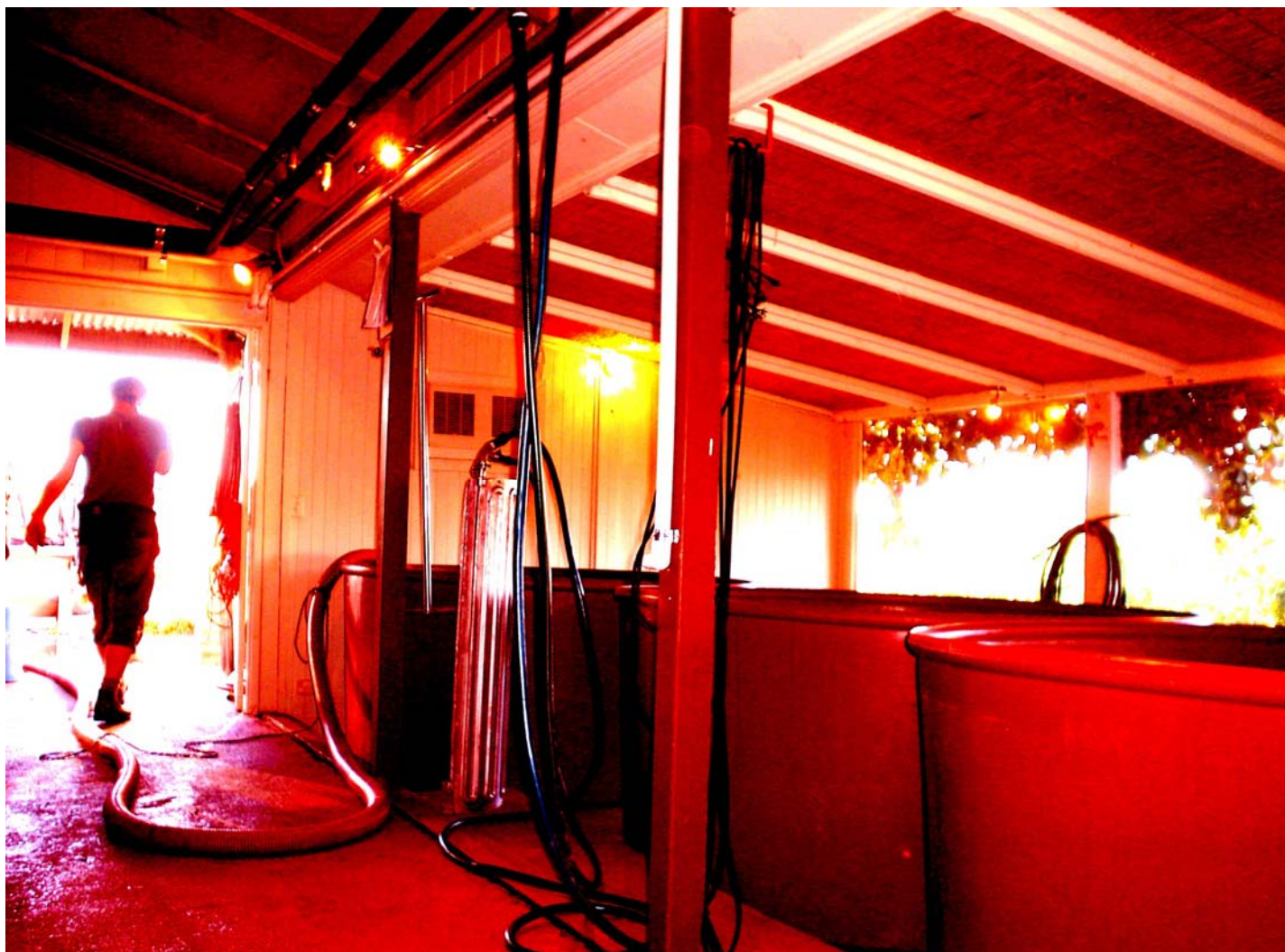
**Wilson Gunn 2005 Shiraz** will be sold in the UK, and will retail in the US for \$28. It will not be available in Australia. The wine was made by Henry Laithwaite- *tasting above*, the son of the major backer of Red Heads. Bottled only eight days ago, it was certainly not showing its best, opening with a touch of bottle pong that blew off fairly quickly leaving hints of pepper, plasticine, red and blue fruits. Juicy fruit, chocolate, spicy pepper, blackberry, blackcurrant flavours became more appealing as the wine opened up. Medium-weight with a solid structure and showing some elegance, the wine has been well crafted and balanced. Rated as Recommended with \*\*\* for value.

**Wilson Gunn 2005 Reserve Shiraz** will also only be sold in the UK and the US; only a hundred cases have been produced. Now this is the business. With lifted floral notes, one can only wonder how good this will be when it settles down. Backed by loads of dusty tannins, the wine

has excellent balance and construction; is medium-weight with a firm but supple consistency, a tight, solid structure and intricate complexity. Juicy fruit, raspberry, chocolate, blackberry, and eucalyptus flavours finish long, firm, persistent and dry. This is a classy wine and the best of the line-up; rated as Excellent it should be long-lived and I wouldn't approach it until at least 2012.

**Pieri Azzardo 2005 Shiraz** is sealed under cork and sells for a little over \$30. Sourced from vines that are only seven to eight years old and grown in sandy soil, this wine shows it is possible to make terrific wine from young vines. 300 cases were produced. It was made by a Red Head employee and is the first release of this wine. The bouquet was certainly different; it showed lifted, perfumed, with sarsaparilla, raspberry and "sun dried grape" aromas. Smooth, tight tannins, balanced acid and pure fruit back a high-quality wine of medium-weight with a supple consistency, almost elegant structure and a sophisticated complexity. Milk chocolate, raspberry, sarsaparilla, more chocolate and a nutty finish; it will be a good food wine.

Rated as Highly Recommended with \*\*\*\* for value, the rating may improve as the wine matures around 2009 and beyond. This is another wine that should be poured down the throat of all those people who think that all Australian Shiraz tastes the same.



**Pikkara 2005 McLaren Vale Shiraz** is not sold in Australia but is available in the US for \$29, as well as Canada and the UK. It was made from fruit grown by Nat McMurtrie and 500 cases are available; there is one barrel of Cinsaut in the blend. (Most of the fruit from this vineyard is sold to Two Hands). Silky, dusty tannins and balanced acid combine with generous fruit to produce an ample-weight wine with a supple consistency, a tight, elegant structure and sophisticated complexity. It has a good mouth feel and is just delightful. Spice, chocolate, black cherry, and black coffee flavours complete the package. Rated as Highly Recommended with \*\*\*\* for value, it'll hit its straps around 2011.

I asked Nat if he was related to the original McMurtrie's who the road is named after, and Nat replied, "Yes and the road is still there too."

**Lazy Ballerina 2005 Prima Donna Shiraz** also contains 3% **Viognier**, is sealed under cork and sells for \$17. A typical Shiraz Viognier black nose, with black fruits and spices; Adam thought it had "carrot cake" characters. Unobtrusive, almost austere tannins provide a soft consistency, and the obvious fruit delivers an open structure. Better than many Shiraz Viognier blends, it's a good party or bistro wine with ripe blackberry, coffee oak, black pepper and apricots. With loads of flavour for the dollar, it will be hugely popular with the masses. Rated as Recommended with \*\*\* for value.

**Lazy Ballerina 2005 Shiraz** is sealed under cork and sells for \$23. Just bottled, although the bouquet was closed and locked tight, some "interesting aromatics" were lurking. Juicy-fruit is driving the wine but it is well backed by dusty tannins that finish dry. A clean, modern wine with very good balance and construction, it is ample-weight with a supple consistency, solid, tight structure and well-developed complexity. Black cherry, pepper and graphite characters are attractive. Absolutely worth cellaring, it is rated as Recommended with \*\*\*\* for value and the rating should improve as the wine matures around 2011.

# winefightclub



Red Heads Studio is located on the corner of Foggo Rd and Kangarilla Rd, McLaren Vale.

Currently open by appointment only. Cellar Door TBA.

[www.redheadswine.com](http://www.redheadswine.com)

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*'Wow - what a line up of wines. They ranged from excellent value to average value, and based on the street price, all were fair.'*

*It certainly showed the enormous diversity that one region, let alone a whole country can produce. It is such a shame that many of those people who think that all Australian wines taste the same don't have the opportunity to taste their way through a line up like this one. Many of them were medium-weight, some were ample weight, a few were a bit bigger, but none of them were blackberry oak shakes, and even more importantly to people, many of these wines are food friendly. All things being equal, it should be open by the end of the year, so if you are visiting McLaren Vale after that time, this is a compulsory destination.'*

- Ric Einstein