IWM *Weekly* BULLETIN

12th December 2011

Welcome to the IWM Weekly Bulletin, a weekly round-up of our favourite wines, snippets, news items & perhaps, even sometimes, gossip…

Australia's WBM is worth the price of its subscription alone for the brilliant weekly *TWTW* email but the magazine itself also provides excellent reading. The November edition has a most interesting article by wine marketing guru Professor Larry Lockshin on what wineries could learn from Apple. Yes, yes, such stories have been ubiquitous since Steve Jobs' death but Lockshin makes some thought-provoking points, in particular that Jobs'/Apple's genius lay in making the complex simple and appealing. Yet wine (another complicated, 'high-risk purchase' product for the consumer) is frequently marketed in exactly the opposite manner; and not only the indisputably complex wines - often the most humble of wine is made out to be more complex than it really is in order to give it (supposed) gravitas. Pointing to Apple's 5% global share of phones but 50% share of profit he notes, "Apple has worked hard to make the package simple and intuitive as the product got more and more complex." Take note those who doggedly list every possible technical fact and then some on their back labels…

Emma's Choice: **2010 Highfield Estate Riesling** **Marlborough** **$18.00**
Riesling is undoubtedly a versatile variety but in particular seems to lend itself to early summer drinking when you want something fresh as a daisy but with perhaps a little more dimension than your average new season sauvignon blanc. This is a wine that hits the spot – poised, just off-dry, a delicious citrussy character with admirable stoniness and minerality, good length and a 'please-do-drink-more' finish. Perfect with asparagus & soft goat's cheese. For some inexplicable reason, Highfield seems rather to fly under the radar a bit in New Zealand but this crisp, crunchy riesling is just the thing with which to (re)acquaint yourself.

Jane's Choice: **2008 Doctors Flat Pinot Noir** **Central Otago** **$39.00**
Winemakers claim to enjoy 'honest feedback' yet in my experience this usually means that fulsome praise is welcome but if you haven't anything nice to say, don't say it. A Waiheke winemaker was very dark when I wrote that I had enjoyed the regular label more than the more expensive (and in my opinion over extracted and over-oaked) premium bottling.

So it was nice to receive an email from Steve Davies, surely one of NZ's nicest winemakers who said, in all honesty, that his debut label design had polarized customers. I tasted the wine last year and thought it was delicious but certainly the yellow label wasn't the most attractive…The good news is that the '08 vintage has a very smart new label which compliments the wine. In the 12 months since I first tasted it, it has developed a lovely touch of age; some savoury fresh mushroom and forest floor notes. Floral, high toned with a very pretty violet character, just a touch of tannin. The 2009 may be the 'better' vintage, but this 2008 is absolutely delicious and perfect for drinking now.

Is it any wonder people regard wine critics/commentators as wankers when even we were left rolling our eyes at the latest comments on natural wine? Douglas Wregg was the culprit here but generally speaking in this territory you can take your pick. Apart from the head-scratching, logic-defying remark that "If you are intervening too much you're not an authentic, but a commercial product" (ahem, surely anyone who intends selling their wine offers a 'commercial' product?) he then goes on to say, "I don't want consistency, I want to be surprised, delighted, upset and challenged." Well, fair enough, don't we all at times? Except, apparently the answer is actually no. Blossom Hill rules, after all. We are all for people stepping outside of their comfort zones and trying something new, and good lord, life, let alone wine, is pretty boring if you don't, but being brow-beaten by a bunch of smug, one-upping, wine-snobs is possible not the best path by which to lead people from Banrock Station to the golden land…

Pseuds' Corner : *" The Riedel Montrachet glass works really well with Godello, Viura and Garnacha Blanco, not so with Verdejo."*

So now you know.

Parting shot: We were slightly taken aback by New Zealand Winegrowers policy of charging for promotional material. Whilst it could be argued that commercial enterprises should pay the going rate, surely there could be some discretion applied? Fair enough to charge for zip drives, caps or wine cooler bags, but for a one-page consumer brochure ($1.60) or wine region map ($8.00) seems a bit steep. Especially when the handouts are being used to educate those working in the hospitality industry. Do they want the information out there or not?

Rockburn Wines www.rockburn.co.nz

It would appear that Malcolm Rees-Francis continues his mission to hone and refine the style of Rockburn wines. Earlier vintages of the pinot noir in particular were very much in the big, opulent Otago honker mold yet the new release 10 is much lighter, prettier and, as a result, more satisfying. (JS)

2011 Pinot Gris **Central Otago** **$22.99** **17.0**
Restrained when first poured, the nose opens to reveal classic pinot gris aromas of ripe pear and red apple. Although there is a touch of sweetness, the alcohol weighs in at only 12.5% meaning that the wine has a freshness and lightness of touch.
2010 Pinot Noir **Central Otago** **$26.99** **18.0**
Bright ruby. Very aromatic with lots of raspberry, red cherry and plum. Some florals too. The palate is deliciously ripe with finely grained tannin providing the structure on which to hang the fruit. Very charming, a wine that has lots of impact but delivers in a subtle way.

Incognito

Incognito is the Fine Wine Delivery Company's 'house label' range sourced from "premium and single estate wines that are in excess of demand" (a nicely euphemistic turn of phrase if ever there was one). The current release is a bit of a mixed bag, though overall a solid enough selection. Some of the styles chosen are rather intriguing, perhaps even a bit left field for what's expected in this category. FWDC does say the range goes like the clappers for them (though Mandy Rice-Davies springs to mind here) so good for them then. The wines seem to us a little bit of a straddle: not really cheap enough to provide the typical mass appeal but neither so accomplished to provide a really consistent cut above the usual own-label offerings to make more discerning bargain-hunters seek them out. Some good buys are to be found however. (EJ)

NV Methode Traditionelle Brut **$17.99**
Given the time/technical requirements of making MT, it is rather impressive there is a breadth of NZ examples at such sharp prices, which in some cases includes some very good wines indeed. The Incognito NV Brut is a good honest example of the Brut style, with a moderate bead, fresh and fruity apple and citrus nose, a touch of bready complexity and an uncomplicated, easy to drink palate. Quite broad on the palate but pleasant nonetheless; friends who dropped round later in the afternoon after I had finished tasting the range commented on how easy to drink this wine was, a good sign seeing that is surely is the point of the exercise.
2011 Sauvignon Blanc **Marlborough** **$14.99**
A textbook, attractive example with decent fruit richness given extra texture and interest by the stony, mineral palate and crisp, dry finish. Cheerful drinking on its own but with enough depth to work well with lighter meals too. No doubt this sort of labeling approach is paying dividends in the MSB category for both the producer (looking to move stock) and the consumer (getting more bang for buck) but there is a lot on offer under standard labels at this price so the competition here must be fierce.
2009 Chardonnay **Hawke's Bay** **$17.99**
The least successful wine in the range. I looked at it several times as I wasn't sure initially if perhaps I was just overly sensitive to acid at the time but after the initial assessment I broached it twice more on successive days and found the same needlessly tart acid and an overall hard edge that is at odds with the wine's overall pleasantly innocuous style: fruity, predominantly banana and melon plus some oak and buttery notes. A nice enough wine with good length and moderate intensity but too hard to get past the rather jarring acidity, which one can't imagine finding favour in the target market either. Not sure if they were trying to head for a Chablisean sort of thing (sigh) as presumably the acid's there to add freshness and structure which, to a degree it does, but alas the whole thing just fails to hang together really. Perhaps no great surprise that this wine will not be gracing its true label?
2009 Pinot Noir **Central Otago** **$17.99**
An appealing nose of strawberry, raspberry and vanilla poached rhubarb with a gentle dusting of dried herbs and spice. The lighter-bodied palate is dry and savoury with fair fruit intensity and length; nicely balanced oak and acidity gives lift and freshness. Cherries and dried herbs with a slight stemminess on the palate, this is not quite the simple juicy example I was expecting, though I did wonder if some might also think the same but be less pleased about that fact. Definitely not one to hang on to but then why would you? Good drinking now - and only $18.

2007 Merlot Malbec Cabernet **Hawke's Bay** **$29.99**
Good nose with a pleasant leafiness adding interest to the plum / cassis /blackberry fruit. A touch of licorice and spice from nicely integrated oak. Palate is on the lighter side of medium-bodied and the bottle age has added extra complexity with savory & cigar box elements plus some mellowness to the palate. A degree of leanness to the fruit but fair length and soft ripe tannins give a good final impression. Again, wouldn't see any need to hang on to this but nice to have something with a bit of maturity and interest for the Sunday lunch. At the $30 mark though, there will be plenty of other competition and it doesn't really offer the value that the others do... it also made me wonder about FWDC's assertion that the Incognito wines retail for around half their normal price: hard to see this as a $50-60 wine, though perhaps indeed that is precisely why it has had to go Incognito...