

CHARTER - CANEPA, CHILEAN WINES

By Paul Foster

The boast used to be that only we put shiraz with cabernet sauvignon and that this blend was uniquely Australian. Well, whatever, it's not only us any more and in Chile the impressive operation that is Canepa Wines is creating what Aussies might rank a 'real' red from that combination. They call the shiraz by its French name, syrah, and the mix is mostly cabernet, but the two together make magic.

Canepa is a major producer. Its vineyards, on the river flats at the base of the Andes, are beautiful both and healthy and yield outstanding fruit. Its wineries are as modern as any anywhere and the company offers an extensive portfolio with numbers of its wines at scary prices. Scary, that is, from the point of view of competitors.

Canepa's history goes back to 1930 when migrant Jose Canepa Vacarezza established a winery after arriving in Chile from Italy. Seems he was a man of energy and vision and his company, still a family affair, has shown itself prepared to embrace the new: new varieties, new viticultural and winemaking techniques and up-to-date marketing. He should be smiling right now for something his grandchildren did in engaging an Australian to consult on styles and standards. Ian 'Macka' McKenzie, CW at Seppelt in the 1980s before progressing to Southcorp in the '90s and who still is a leading Sow Judge, became one of our famous Flying Winemakers and today modestly admits to believing he's helped make Canepa what it is.

The Wine Society imports a selection of Canepa wines that includes a Pinot Grigio, two Sauvignon Blancs and a red made from the rare Bordeaux variety Camenere. Here are my favourites.

Canepa *Finisimo* Cabernet Sauvignon 2006

This is the red with Syrah, a muscly number that weighs in at 14.5% alcohol. A dense purple crimson, an intense berry nose and a palate of depth and length. Plum pudding and blackberry fruit flavours. Charred cedary oak. Smooth texture and firm fine-tannin finish. \$15.99

Canepa *Finisimo* Sauvignon Blanc 2008

Well-bred Sauvignon Blanc that declares its identity with restraint. Marlborough, no; more in the mould of the minerally wines of Sancerre. Fabulously fresh palate, crisp almost crunchy. Grassy, grapefruit flavours with just a touch of stonefruit. \$12.99

Time was when we proudly boasted that Australia was unique in producing red wines blended from Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. A magical mixture, they said, that makes the most of two great grape varieties that thrive in our soils and only Australia could do it. Well, perhaps we should sip some Cab-Shiraz as we eat humble pie, for the producer *Canepa*