The BrightWines Beacon for April 28th - May 6th: Go west, mate! (Western Australia & more southern hemisphere)

One thing for certain is that May begins this week and it is most definitely spring! Another thing that we know for certain is that if it's spring here, our wine friends in the southern hemisphere are having autumn and have been harvesting and making wine over the past several weeks. The majority of the southern hemisphere new vintage wines are harvested and made during Feb/MArch/April months. Every year, usually in April, here at BrightWines I make a point to help celebrate the harvest season down-under by featuring wines from Australia / New Zealand, Chile/Argentina, South Africa and Uruguay. This year I am very pleased to be able to focus our attention on a region of the southern hemisphere that rarely sees the spotlight. Yes, we are all quit familiar with Australian wines but mostly by way of the wines from South Australia like the great Shiraz wines from the Barossa and McLaren Vale as well as other nearby regions. But the wines of Western Australia and the wine regions nearby to Perth like Margaret River are less well-known and offer a rather different style of Australian wine. Some of you may be fans already and know how rare the wines are to find, others might be new to wine from the great out west of Australia - either way the wines featured in this weekend's newsletter are some of the best examples you will find. Read on to The Lamp is Lit for tastings, and The View from the Top for some background info, and Bright Lights for a listing of the featured wines!

** Dave's Top Picks from the Southern Hemisphere, in-stock now, a couple of good examples for every country: South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina - plus a great TANNAT from Uruguay too! See BRIGHT LIGHTS for details of great new wines and some re-stocked favorites too. Including the triumphant return to the market after several years absence of GEMTREE Shiraz (Dragonstone, and Uncut) and BrightWines is the first (once again) to introduce and welcome them back!  
** Featured Winery: Howard Park (and Madfish) from the Margaret River and "Great Southern" regions of Western Australia. See BRIGHT LIGHTS for their range of white and red 89 - 91 point rated wines!

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP: Go west, young mate! (western Australia)

So what do these rather rare-to-see but very high quality Aussie wines have in common: Vasse Felix, Leeuwin Estatate, Cape Mentelle, Madfish & Howard Park, all have in common? They are all from vineyards and winery a continent away (in far western Australia) from where the vast majority of the wines and wineries we know as Australian are made. For example, the wines from the most important region (Margaret River) of the state of Western Australia - despite it being the 2nd largest geographic area of any so-called "state" in the world - represents only 3% of the production of Australian wine. The closest big city is Perth, and the wine regions we know (or might know) include Margaret River, as well as Frankland, Mount Barker, Porongorups, among other more broadly designated "Great Southern" wine regions too.

The wine regions of Western Australia are known for their distinctive style and high quality. Margaret river may be only 3% of the production, but is more like 20% of the premium wine category for Australia. Here in this country we know that within the large state of California there are warmer and cooler climate zones, and taking it a bit further we certainly know that Oregon climate for wine is not the same as Washington or California necessarily too. Well, the vast expanse of territory within Western Australia and sheer distance between, say Margaret River near Perth and it's Barossa counterpart near Adelaide would also logically mean we cannot expect to lump the wines from such disparate areas into the same category. So while they do make Shiraz, the style is not necessarily the same and in fact Margaret River is actually better known for Cabernet Sauvignon than for Shiraz. Chardonnay does well out west too, as the climate is cooler overall. The usual reaction to the wines from way out west is that they seem a bit more European and dry as compared to many typical Aussie wines.

In learning about Western Australia wines, one of the two most important areas to become familiar with would be the "Great Southern" region of Western Australia. It is Australia's largest specific wine region, and encompasses 5 sub-regions of which Frankland River, Mount Barker, and Porongorups are best known internationally. The soils are similar to the Margaret River region (which is closer to Perth) and like all of Western Australia is a cooler and dryer, maritime-influenced "mediterranean climate" overall, with terroir and micro-climate variations that justify the five sub-regional designations.

Probably the most important of the two great Western Australia wine regions is the Margaret River region. The Margaret River wine region is made up predominately of boutique size wine producers, and certainly the most widely-known, if not the best, of the western Australian wine regions. The climate of Margaret River is more strongly maritime-influenced than any other major Australian region and has a cooler, dryer, maritime-influenced, "mediterranean" climate, which overall is similar to that of Bordeaux, France in a dry vintage. In fact, the "bordeaux varietals" do well in Margaret River.
I have a long history with Australia wines here at BrightWines, in fact an extended trip to Australia (which included some minor wine travel) is part of the reason I found myself in the wine business in the first place. I have also been proud to champion many great Aussie wine names and am proud to have helped introduce many labels to the Twin Cities wine market, including bargains like Yellowtail (used to be good) and Southern Sisters on up to highly-rated wines that BrightWines featured exclusively like Gemtree "Bloodstone" and Kaesler and even Amon-Ra among others. Over the years I have always wanted to do a feature on Western Australian wines, knowing their distince style and geography, but never have. In 17 years here at BrightWines this is my first newsletter article on Western Australia. I have been able to feature wines like Vasse Felix (the first ever vineyards in Margaret River) and Robert Oatley, as well as other winery's single-vineyard wines from Mount Barker and Frankland, and a other few "western australia" wines too, but as they all seem to be they are not as commonly found at retail as the rest of Australia. And while I have been to Australia (just not out west) for this article, I had to rely on information gleaned from The Oxford Companion and a couple of surprisingly complete and informative wikipedia entries. Here are those links: 


Read on to Bright Lights for today's featured winery, Howard Park (and Madfish) from Margaret River, and more!

BRIGHT LIGHTS: Dave's Top Picks from the southern hemisphere

** Dave's Top Picks from the southern hemisphere **

Here is just a few wines per country list of what is IN-STOCK NOW as part of my "Harvest season, Down-under" feature for end April. Highlights include a 91 point rated Barossa Shiraz for $12.99 (re-stocked this week) * plus *

New Arrivals in TANNAT from Uruguay, a new vintage of my best under-$10 MALBEC from Argentina, new blends from South Africa, and the triumphant return of GEMTREE from the McLaren Vale, and more!

(Uuguay) Familia DEICAS 2015 Uruguay TANNAT @ $17.99 per bottle (down-under feature price)
Great history for Uruguayan Tannat, I tasted this recently with the importer (Paul Hobbs imports) and it's the best Tannat from Uruguay I have tasted in years. Very impressive for a reasonable price.

(South Africa) NABYGELEGEN 2015 Red Blend and/or 2016 White Blend @ $11.99 per bottle (down-under feature price)
25% off the $16 suggested retail, modern yet serious red blend (and white blend too) from a great winemaker in South Africa

(South Africa) MIDDELVLEI 2012 Stellenbosch PINOTAGE @ $14.99 per bottle (last case, direct from importer)
This is the "free run" Pinotage, with deep and juicy blueberry and exotic spice

(New Zealand) HUIA 2015 Marlborough SAUVIGNON BLANC @ $15.99 per bottle (down-under feature price)
Rated 92 points Wine Enthusiast (at $20) "harmoniously blends hints of cut grass and struck flint with pink grapefruit."

(Chile) Vina los Boldos "SANAMA" Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Sauvignon Blanc and/or Carmenere @ $5.99 per bottle (sale price)
Bargain Alert: these 3 new wines are my replacement for the "120" series of wines, and they are impressing BrightWines customers. They are all more dry and elegant style than "120" but are classic Chilean wines, very good quality, and just $5.99 per botlte mix/match sale pricing for this feature and my spring sale too.

(Australia) Thorn-Clarke TERRA BAROSSA 2015 Barossa SHIRAZ @ $12.99 per bottle (down-under feature price)
Rated 91 points Wine Spectator (at $16) "dark and dense, black licorice and thick tannins forming the backdrop to blackberry and plum"

(Australia) GEMTREE 2015 SHIRAZ "Dragonstone" (McLaren Vale) @ $14.99 per bottle ($155.88/case = $12.99 each)
the triumphant return of Gemtree, after several years out of the market!

(Australia) GEMTREE 2015 "Uncut" SHIRAZ (McLaren Vale) @ $19.99 per bottle ($239.88/case)
new vintage of a former Wine Spectator Top 100 wine, the triumphant return to our market!

(Argentina) Zuccardi 2013 "Q" Cabernet Sauvignon @ $15.99 per bottle ($191.88/case, sale price)
current Wine Spectator Top 100 wine! Rated 91 points, at $20 retail. A malbec-lovers Cabernet!
**FEATURED WINERY: Western Australia (Margaret River) HOWARD PARK **

A brief history of HOWARD PARK (also produces the popular value-priced Madfish wines): Howard Park wines is the largest family-owned winery in Western Australia. Their Margaret River winery is located outside the small town of Cowaramup, the birthplace of the Margaret River wine region. Their first vintage was 1986 and since 2009 have been members of the prestigious "Australia's First Family" group of wineries, and the only one from Western Australia. Other wineries in this group of twelve includes such famous and historic family winery names like Yalumba, D'Arenberg, Jim Barry, Henschke, and more. The main criteria is that the family-owned companies need to have a "landmark wine" in their portfolios, a wine that is considered "iconic". Other criteria are they must have the ability to do at least a 20-year vertical tasting, have a history going back a minimum of two generations, ownership of vineyards more than 50 years old and/or distinguished sites, commitment to export and environmental best practiced, good tasting room experience, etc.


The recent vintages of Howard Park winery wines from 2013 reds and 2015 & 2016 whites are getting great press in the American wine magazines like Wine Spectator, Wine Enthusiast, and Robert Parker's Wine Advocate - but until recently have not been available in our market, with very limited exception (the Madfish label, for example). So here at BrightWines I am very proud to introduce these top-quality "smart buys" from Margaret River, by Howard Park.

**HOWARD PARK 2016 Margaret River SAUVIGNON BLANC / Semillon @ $17.99 per bottle**  ($215.88/case, mix/match)
Suggested Retail: $23 - $25 (see W.E. and W.S.)

This fresh vintage that's not-quite New Zealand but not-quite Bordeaux Graves is part of the "Miamup" label series for Howard Park. This **Bordeaux-style blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon rated 89 points** by Wine Enthusiast, who notes: "This is pungent, showing some sweaty, boxwood notes alongside lemony citrus fruit. It's light on its feet, with moderately intense lemon flavors that fade on the finish. Drink now. 89 points."

**MAD FISH (by Howard Park) Vera's Cuvee BRUT sparkling @ $19.99 per bottle**  ($119.95/6pk)
Suggested Retail: $25 (see W.S.)

Champagne-method blend of 77% Chardonnay and 23% Pinot Noir, a Brut Sparkling from Western Australia. The current shipment just rated 88 points by **Wine Spectator (at $25 retail)** noting: "Intense and juicy, with peach and honeysuckle flavors and a touch of brioche toast on the finish." (limited stock)

**HOWARD PARK 2015 Margaret River CHARDONNAY @ $19.99 per bottle**  ($215.88/case, mix/match)
Suggested Retail: $25 (see W.S.)

Part of the Miamup label series, this is **90 point rated** by Wine Enthusiast! "**Drawn from the southern (cooler) section of Margaret River,** this is a medium to full-bodied Chardonnay with a fair whack of oak. Vanilla, toast and butter notes mark the nose, and the wine adds peach, pear and citrus fruit on the palate. Overall, it **offers fine balance and a long finish.**" The Wine Spectator also recommends it and notes it's sense of restraint and dryness too, noting that it's "Juicy, with tangy lime, tangerine and peach flavors, this is lively and crisp on the finish, appealing for the refreshment and transparency." This is a great California-meets-WhiteBurgundy sort of style, if you ask me!

**HOWARD PARK 2013 Flint Rock (Great Southern region) SHIRAZ @ $17.99 per bottle**  ($215.88/case, mix/match)
Suggested Retail: $25

Dave says: of the two signature Shiraz wines by Howard Park, I preferred the Flint Rock from the "Great Southern" region of western Australia to their home-estate flagship "Liston" vineyard (which was perhaps too austere and intense). This Flint Rock has the ideal combination of power and **spice and northern-Rhone dryness partnered with the richness and fullness and dark fruit-depth** we've come to expect in Aussie Shiraz. It turns out that Robert Parker's Wine Advocate agrees with me, they rated it 89+ points. This is the "smart buy" red in the Howard Park signature lineup, showcasing the unique style of Shiraz they do in the western regions.
HOWARD PARK 2013 "Miamup" Margaret River CABERNET SAUVIGNON @ $19.99 per bottle ($239.88/case, limited)
Rated 91 points and "Editors Choice" by Wine Enthusiast. The Margaret River is the "Bordeaux of Australia" and this Cabernet hints at why. For those of you who think Australian Cabernet is too "Shiraz-ey" or not serious enough for food or the cellar, this Cabernet will impress you, I'm sure. Wine Enthusiast notes: "a firm, dusty-textured Cabernet. Vanilla, tobacco and cherry notes start things off and extend through the long finish. It offers at least a decade of aging potential at a very reasonable price. 91 points."

That's all for my spring of 2017 "Harvest Celebration for Down-under" featuring a variety of southern hemisphere wines IN-STOCK.

email orders are accepted, some stocks might be limited - especially on the featured winery from Margaret River in Western Australia.

** postscript: go west, young man **
Did you know that the phrase "Go west, young man" is of somewhat disputed origin, but is usually attributed to 1800's newspaper editor/author Horace Greeley in favor or westward expansion and manifest destiny. Interestingly, Greeley himself was also a strong advocate for "temperance" although the aim of those efforts was mostly against hard liquor, not so much wine or beer. In fact, Horace Greeley once suggested that American wine could be an antidote to "intemperance" and he was also known to be a proponent of the Concord grape. -- Dave

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www.brightwines.com 651-748-0793
2420 Margaret St, North Saint Paul, MN 55109
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