



WORDS CLIVE HARTLEY

GROUNDS FOR GROWTH

THERE is an excitement throbbing through South Australia's Barossa Valley, a vibrancy and reinvigorating feeling that expresses optimism for the future of the region. For many years, the older generation growers have been passing the mantel over to the younger generation of farmers. Barossa is renowned for its growers and while numbers have decreased there are still around 550 registered in the region.

The maturity of the region is showing as this new generation either select old practices that make sense to continue or adopt new ideas firmly based on scientific research. This ranges from viticultural practices through to planting new grape varieties.

Technically the region is exploring new grounds, literally. Barossa has 175 years of grape growing and winemaking history but until recently nothing was documented on why one vineyard delivered different aromas and flavours than another. In the past 10 years the Barossa Ground Project has started to unearth diversity through a detailed look at its soils. Initially 80 single vineyards were looked at in an attempt to record their difference. Then in 2014 they whittled it down nine key "grounds" and made wine out of them, keeping the winemaking simple and constant. At the same time, a scientific report was written on climate, soils and the topography of the Barossa terroir.

Just to put the record straight, Barossa is the zone and when used on a label it can be made from Barossa Valley and/or Eden Valley fruit. While Barossa Valley and Eden Valley can only be from their respected geographically mapped out valleys. High Eden is a legal sub-region of the Eden Valley.

The Barossa Grounds project is a collaboration between Barossa Grape and Wine Association, South Australian soil scientists (such as David Maschmedt) and viticulturalists and State Government's Department of Primary Industries.

The first differentiation between the Barossa zone soils and wines is the marked difference between Barossa Valley and the Eden Valley.

Eden Valley provides the fragrance and lifted aromas together with acidity and tannins, while the Barossa Valley provides the depth and power.

Ninety-nine percent of the 3000ha of vineyards in the Eden are above 280m, and the highest is up to 630m. It is considerably higher than the Barossa Valley, and is wetter and cooler. When the Barossa Valley can hit 40C in the height of summer, there can be a three degree dip in the Eden. The soils are rocky and mainly shallow in the Eden Valley. Some are termed as skeletal yellow sandy podzolic in nature. Nicki Robins, Viticultural Development Officer for the Barossa Grape & Wine Association calls these soils "skinny," defining them as unfertile with a lack of nutrients and composed of a lot of rocks and sand. They are free draining which can cause a problem in

the current drought conditions. These restrict yields and produce wines that are more elegant, medium bodied with higher natural acidity. Shiraz will show more red and black cherry with an herbal edge. Taking the Mount Edelstone vineyard as a classic example, the Henschke family describe the vineyard characteristics as "sage leaf and black pepper". A few producers make wines from both regions. Sons of Eden, for example, produce two wines; an Eden Valley and a Barossa Valley shiraz called Remus and Romulus respectively. Remus shows white pepper and blackcurrant leaf, while Romulus has ripe blackcurrant fruit. Remus is more tannic than Romulus, but the latter is more "fuller and riper," according to my notes on the 2015 vintage.

Many producers blend the two regions together and it is not hard to see why. Eden Valley provides the fragrance and lifted aromas together with acidity and tannins, while the Barossa Valley provides the depth and power.

The project split the Barossa Valley into three "grounds"- northern, central and southern. In the north there is a western ridge rising to 450m that has red earth with schist and ironstone, the topsoils here are very thin. It is the presence of this ironstone "fleck" that winemaker Tim Smith reckons is a desirable attribute to a good vineyard. The parishes of Greenock and Seppeltsfield are contained in the ridge of the northern grounds and contain some of the oldest soil in the valley, while Ebenezer, Moppa and Kalimna are on flatter aspects. The northern grounds can give you the most powerful expression of Barossa shiraz.

In the central grounds lies the parishes

of Bethany and Krondorf as well as the Vine Vale, Light Pass, Gomersol and Marananga areas. Here the altitude is between 180m to 280m and is warmer but tempered by gully breezes from the eastern ridge, which is the topographical feature of the valley.

The soils on the central grounds are sandy loam and black cracking clay, a term that indicates what happens when they dry out. These are some of the most common soils found in the valley. There is a band of extremely sandy soils around the Light Pass and Vine Vale area. Here you will find what is thought to be the oldest grenache vineyard in the world, owned by Marco Cirillo. The vines were planted in 1850 and qualify as "Ancestor vines" being greater than 125 years of age. This is according to the Barossa Old Vine Charter that classifies vines into four categories. "Old vines" are classified as equal or greater than 35 years old. "Survivor vines" are equal or greater than 70 years of age, while "Centenarian vines" are equal or greater than 100 years of age. "Ancestor" is the oldest. The shiraz coming out of this area provides plenty of blackberry, blueberry and fruitcake aromas, and is medium to full-bodied in style.

The southern grounds is around the parish of Lyndoch and also covers the Rowland Flats area. It has the lowest altitude starting at 110m and generally warmer than the central and northern grounds. There is more rainfall here than the other two regions in the Barossa Valley. The soils are predominately sandy or clay loams. From these soils the wines display more red rather than black fruits, with softer, riper tannins.



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