



WORDS CLIVE HARTLEY

OUR NATIONAL TREASURES DESERVE RECOGNITION

RECENTLY I wrote about a project that is afoot in the Barossa Valley to recognise sub regions, and it is a healthy sign we are delving into our rich viticultural history to recognise the special and distinct patches of dirt in our country.

Travelling overseas you quickly realise that the Europeans have been doing it for centuries and are masters at defining and delineating their terroir. They have some magical lands. The twists and turns and subtle undulations of the contours of Bourgogne are all mapped, documented and subdivided down into tiniest of plots. While on a grand scale whole regions such as the Douro Valley in Portugal, Champagne and Bordeaux in France, the Middle Rhine in Germany, Tokaj in Hungary, Piedmont and Pantelleria off the coast of Italy have all been recognised as UNESCO world heritage sites. Simply put, some sites are better than others, and it is the quest to identify them and record and understand them that has led to this recognition and the classification systems of Europe.

Italy has lagged behind France in recognising its best sites, but the rise of Menzioni Geografiche Aggiuntive (MGA) classifications is rectifying that. In Barolo now we have a staggering 181 sites recorded. True, some people would say this makes understanding wine more complex and complicated than it needs to be, but others relish the diversity. This drilling down and defining is not going to stop anytime soon as I recently discovered on a visit to the remote Dolceacqua region in Liguria. Here 33 MGAs for rossese vineyards have been registered. Four years of research went into identifying the vineyards with a rich history of viticulture going back to Roman times. Take for example the 380m-450m high east facing 30 per cent sloping hill top

vineyard of Arcagna. It was first cultivated by a Roman family called Aurinia in the 1st century AD followed by the Benedictine monks in the 11th century. It currently has vines aged between 50 and 120 years old. Filippo Rondelli, from Terre Bianche, makes a lovely wine (Bricco Arcagna) from this ancient site. Rossese produces elegant light to medium bodied wines similar to pinot noir, with white pepper and red fruits. Rondelli was instrumental in researching the MGA sites in Dolceacqua and is rightly proud of his region and its history.

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But what about Australia's treasured sites? Compared to Dolceacqua the Hunter Valley is a new viticultural area about to rack up a mere 200 years of viticultural activity. But it is competitive on its vine age. "We have possibly the oldest chardonnay vines in the world," comments Bruce Tyrrell, referring to

their HVD "Old Vines" Chardonnay with a block dating back to 1908. "It was planted by the Hunter Valley Distillery Company and obviously used for making spirit," he adds. Tyrrells is itself a national treasure with their historic cellar door that is a must-see destination in the Hunter. It would be remiss to discuss national wine treasures without considering the winery sites themselves as attractions. A number of them should be National Trust sites, maybe we need a national register for them to be included in the National Heritage list? Here are just a few of my favourites.

In South Australia's Barossa Valley the majestic library of back vintage casks that make up the Para Tawny Collection in the Centennial Cellar which can be tasted and toured at Seppeltsfield deserves as much adoration as the Sydney Opera House. Where else can you taste single vintage tawny dating back to 1902? Add to this their historic site featuring a must-see gravity-fed winery built in 1888. It contributes to make the Barossa Valley a top global destination. Henschke's Hill of Grace is indisputably Australia's most revered and treasured vineyard. Nestled in the rural charm of the Eden Valley next to its cute Lutheran church, it remains a peaceful place for the old, priceless vines dating from 1860. While heading north, the Clare Valley has the unique and totally unexpected Jesuit-owned Sevenhill winery and accompanying mini cathedral.

Victoria has an abundance of treasures with the likes of Yeringberg in the Yarra. Established in 1862 it is still in the hands of the original family who are caretakers of the original historic winery. In the tiny Great Western region you have Seppelts and their famous 1868 "drives," excavated by out of work gold miners that extend for 3km. Literally


BARLEY STACKS  WINES

Uniquely Yorke Peninsula

next door you have the hidden gem of Best's. Here nestled in the Concongella vineyard is the Nursery Block which Henry Best planted in the 1860s. It is believed to be the most extensive pre-phylloxera plantings in the world, with a staggering 39 separate varieties of which eight are still to be identified. Some of the identified ones such as olvette noir, grec rose, morocan noir are not on my radar. These make what is probably the most historic field blend in the world.

Staying in Victoria we have Tahbilk at Nagambie Lakes. Here is a big day out! With the wetland trail, historic buildings, which once held a whole community, and the underground cellars built in 1862. Then there are the vineyards - shiraz vines dating back to 1860, as well as the largest and oldest plantings of marsanne vines in the world (1927).

It is not all about history, either, as d'Arenberg's Cube in McLaren Vale is a modern contemporary complex worthy of inclusion as is Tasmania's MONA art complex housing the historic Moorilla Vineyard.

Coming full circle back to the Hunter Valley; a research project is in full swing to identify the historic sites in the Hunter. "We have identified 11 blocks of vineyards on their own rootstock, which are all over 100 years old," says Tyrrell. The project has the aim of establishing the Hunter as a UNESCO world heritage site. But equally important is to actually be able to document the history of these sites. "Nothing was ever written down," comments Tyrrell, and with his lineage and connections he was the right person to back the project which is being driven by winemaker Andrew Margan. It will be another 12 months before the survey is complete but it will no doubt add to our list of national treasures. 



Cellar Door and Function Centre
Open 7 days 10am-5pm

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