

AUSTRALIAN WINE REVIEW

WINE AND BEER RAMBLINGS SINCE 2008. NO PUNCHES PULLED.

Joy from the South of France : Abbotts & Delaunay Alto Stratus carignan 2011

by Andrew Graham

Score : 18.5/20 - 94/100



I tasted this at dinner last night with Laurent Delaunay, one half of the Abbotts & Delaunay partnership and something of a 'super negociant'. Burgundian Laurent makes wine from all over France, yet it is the south of France that he is most passionate about - when I mentioned how much I enjoyed this red, he started pulling out iphone photos of 100 year old Carignan bush vines...

As is often the case these forgotten, ancient vines can produce some wonderfully intense wines when they're given some love. Wines of character, meaty richness and a bit of wildness with layers of flavour.

This 100% Carignan is a perfect example. Sourced from a combination of 104 year old bush vines grown at a slightly higher altitude along with fruit grown on lower, steeper slopes grown alongside the local garrigue native vegetation. 60% whole bunches make their way into the ferment and the rest destemmed, but what is most interesting is the choice of maturation vessels - Laurent swears that by keeping a third of the blend in variable capacity tanks it preserves freshness and gives life to the final wine. Seems to work alright here, giving a new world edge of more reductive vitality.

Technically this wine is labelled simply as 'Vin de France' as it cannot qualify for the Minervois appellation because it is not a blend - an intriguing twist on the AOC laws.

Speaking of intrigue, the nose here has plenty - hung red meat, chicken stuffing, cranberries, 'garrigue' herb and spice and cooked plum fruit. There is a savoury-but-generous mid palate sweetness and more complexity than you can poke a stick at it. Sometimes it is almost confected and juicy, other times all about beef stock and dry tannins.

Ultimately its never going to please someone looking for absolute purity, but gee there is an awful lot of personality here, at a very fine price. Loved it.