

Rough around the edges



By Ben Canaider

Beauty or beast? In the case of this shiraz, it's all in the eye – or tastebuds – of the beholder

When is a fault a foible and a foible a fault? With wine, as with people, it all depends on interpretation. There really isn't any right or wrong. The fault/foible debate has recently been enjoying reams of newspaper print in regard to this week's reviewed wine: Scorpo shiraz.

South Australian-based wine columnist Tim White, for example, did a bit of a fond remembrance of his 10 years in wine writing and decided to list his 10 favourite Australian wines of that period. The Scorpo shiraz got a guernsey, which is quite an achievement for a small, essentially family-run, Mornington Peninsula label only a year or so old.

The interesting thing about all of this is the wine's smell and flavour. It's a bit out there, or 'funky', as the serious young wine people like to say.

These words mean that the wine in question is not entirely clean; its manners are a little rough around the edges; it is not a textbook-perfect, Australian robot-wine with all the t's crossed and i's dotted. Read my review (below) and you will get the idea.

Another wine columnist,

Melbourne-based Jeremy Oliver, noted Tim White's comment on the Scorpo shiraz and wrote a piece about the wine himself.

Tim's opinion was that the wine was faulty. It was suffering from a problem called *brettanomyces*. This is a yeast spoilage that gets into a winery's woodwork and infects wines left, right and centre. At high registrations, it makes the wine taste metallic, particularly at the back of the mouth.

Brettanomyces also affect the ability of the wine to age gracefully. It gets harder and meaner as the years trip by.

The interesting thing about this debate is Tim's stance on *brettanomyces*: he hates them and picks them in nearly every wine he tastes. And being accused by Jeremy of overlooking this fault must have hurt. It did; and Tim replied in yet another article that it wasn't really 'brett' at all.

Oh dear. As Sebastian Flyte said to Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*, when the two were in Italy on vacation: "Oh, Charles, what does it matter when the church was built if it is beautiful?"

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Scorpo Mornington Peninsula Shiraz 2001, \$32

Not everyone will like this wine, but it wasn't made with silly democratic appeal in mind. It has its own personality, thank goodness. Admittedly, it is a bit on the nose, with hints of a leaking

septic tank or a swamp. Fish wouldn't live in it! But on top of that, there's a bright suggestion of pepper, freshly crushed and sprinkled over barely ripe berries. There's goat on a spit ... a blueberry tart cooling on the kitchen windowsill. This is a drying and savoury, structured wine.