

After Hours

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Wine Tim White

A drop with a little bit EXTRA

When everything from choosing the name to designing the packaging and, of course, producing the contents is done with the utmost care, you have the makings of an "It" wine.

Sometimes you happen on a wine label that you want to be really successful, to do really well. Not that I would ever wish the opposite to occur – that is, for a winery to fail – but sometimes you come across a producer who appears to have made just that little bit more effort with what they're making; one who somehow manages to confer the end result with that little something extra.

Scorpo Wines on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula is one of these.

Before I had set eyes on a bottle of the stuff, the name had me intrigued. Scorpo? It sounded positively medieval to me – but it turned out to be the family name of Paul who with wife Caroline and daughters Emma, Sarah and Claire are Scorpo Wines.

Although Scorpo was an obvious choice, it was not the first choice. Paul told me that the family deliberated for quite some time about what to call themselves. They contemplated Merricks Hill Vineyard for a while, and also dallied with Derringdagoon (which sounds like a musical starring Gene Kelly and Cyd Charisse, but is in fact a sub-regional name that Paul discovered on an 1850s map of the peninsula).

In the end, the family stuck with Scorpo. A friend of Paul's, Sandro Mosele, the winemaker at Kooyong, was the person who finally pushed them in the direction of the family name. Good advice, I reckon.

When I did get to see a bottle of Scorpo wine, I was as impressed by the packaging as I was by the contents. A dark, heavy, deep-punctured antique green bottle; labelling that conjured up the alchemical. The type used on the label was apparently found in a 17th-century music manuscript. What I took to be some sort of faded Middle Ages illuminated "S" is, in fact, a painting by local artist Ildiko Kovacs, and inspired by the journeying themes of Aboriginal rock art.



It was four years before the Scorpo family found the right location for their vineyard, now on Mornington Peninsula.

drinking it

Scorpo Shiraz 2001 (Mornington Peninsula, Victoria)

Smells of raspberries, blackberries, black pepper, gunpowder and mocha-scented oak. There's a waft or two of sulphide as well, but this blows off with air. In the mouth, it's even more delicious; there's the raspberries and blackberries again, plenty of peppery spice, supple black plum fruit evolving across the palate, and long, dry Tuscan-like tannins.

This is seriously good and will be even better with another year or two in the bottle. 93(94)/100, \$31. Buy it from Best Cellars in NSW, East End Cellars in SA and Randall the Wine Merchant in Victoria.

Redman Shiraz 2001 (Coonawarra, SA)

Earthy mineral smelling, with black cherries and nutmeg spiciness, and some clove too. Attacks with a big sparkly bomb of raspberry and loganberry fruit, the tannin is really fine, and there are attractive, wholemeally, older oak characters to close. Some green pepper too. Luscious cooler climate shiraz. 90/100, \$21.

Clearly a lot of care and attention had been paid to this vital fine wine ingredient, and it turns out the Scorpos worked with two different designers on their packaging. Just as they were about to go with one look, Caroline ventured that it was still not right. They started anew with another designer, Jane Kleimeyer, who also happens to be a family friend.

Once again: good choice. Even the capsule conveys quality.

Then, in November last year, at the Australian Alternative Wine

Scorpo believes that wine achieves greater complexity if it comes from different maturation zones, which you find when vine rows run up and down hillsides.

Show in Mildura, I finally got to meet Paul Scorpo. He was in town with Mosele, who makes Scorpo's wines at Kooyong. Mosele was judging at the show, while Paul was exhibiting his 2001 Pinot Gris. The wine ended up being awarded a silver medal, which is on par with the 90/100 I gave it in a blind tasting almost a year ago. It has really blossomed in bottle over the past six months, though, becoming plumper and more fragrant. Anyhow, I liked Paul's attitude

as well as his wine. There's no hint of preciousness about him, yet at the same time he has a serious commitment to quality. As well as a passionate – genuine – love of wine and food. Believe me, I've met plenty of new entrants to the wine industry who might as well be talking about nuts and bolts, so little do they seem to care about one of life's most precious gifts.

So I now know a lot more about Scorpo Wines. The vineyard is tiny: just five hectares, although not all of this is bearing.

It's planted to mixed clones of chardonnay, pinot gris, pinot noir, and shiraz, and faces north and north-east.

The shiraz clone is a South Australian selection that was chosen because it was meant to do best in cool climates, which Mornington certainly is. I've always been sceptical about reds on the peninsula, pinot excepted, of course. But Paul's 2001 shows what can be done on a warm and protected site. If Scorpo Wines can produce shiraz like this, say, half a dozen times a decade, they will develop a very loyal following.

Aside from clones, Paul believes in hillsides. The original family home of Solino in Sicily is a hillside town, and he loved growing up there until his family emigrated to Australia in 1957. So the Scorpo vineyard is on a hill, and it took the family four years to find the right location. They looked at the Yarra Valley, the Bellarine Peninsula and Avoca.

Paul insists that the hillside thing is not purely emotional. He

believes that wine achieves much greater complexity if it comes from different maturation zones, which you find when vine rows run up and down hillsides.

"Sandro and I discuss this quite a bit," he tells me.

"At Kooyong they've got a 3 per cent incline while we have a 10 per cent incline – so we argue about the complexity of hillsides, and laugh a lot."

He talks with Mosele regularly, as his wine is vinified at Kooyong – which, tonne for tonne, is turning out some of the best wine in Australia at present. At Kooyong all wines are vinified in separate batches and kept by block, and clone by clone. Paul says what he has learned from Mosele has been invaluable in refining his winegrowing philosophy.

Prices for Scorpo wines range from \$28 to \$36 – a fair ask for wines that have received such care and attention at all stages.

The vineyard is cropped at two tonnes to about half a hectare, giving annual production of just 2000 cases. In 2002 there will be even less as crops averaged just 280 to 350 kilos per half hectare!

Little wonder, then, that Paul's landscape architecture business still occupies almost two-thirds of his time.

"My mother calls the vineyard my luxury – my *lusso*," he laughs. "But I'd like to see it become a bit more than that."

If Scorpo Wines keeps travelling the way it is at the moment, and if vintages are kind, there is every chance of that happening. ■