

Victory is sweet for Doug Govan's Rudderless

JAMES HALLIDAY *The Australian* May 04, 2013 12:00AM

WHEN Doug Govan bought the Victory Hotel near South Australia's Sellicks Beach in 1989, he planted a vineyard around the hotel and named it Rudderless.

This wasn't a reflection of his life; it was named after an old, rudderless wooden boat that he and a group of friends had painstakingly restored. In fact, Govan had covered a lot of ground on the way to the Victory Hotel, beginning with the management (aged 21) of the bar in an Adelaide nightclub owned by man-about-town Derek Jolly.

The club was not doing well when Govan arrived, but he quickly revived its fortunes, becoming a good friend of Jolly, with whom he enjoyed sharing a late-night bottle of wine. One bottle was a 1972 Rothbury Estate Semillon. "It blew me away," says Govan. "I had no idea a white wine could taste so good." Epiphany number one.

Govan went on to establish his own nightclub/restaurant in Adelaide, which was successful from day one. His wine education continued, and when he sold his venture, he purchased the Victory Hotel and its 2.8 ha of surrounding land, ideal for a small vineyard.

As one does, he'd enjoyed a glass of champagne at Yarra Yering at 9.30 one morning with the founder, Bailey Carrodus, and the discussion turned to malbec. Epiphany number two came when Carrodus went to his bottle cellar and produced a 1977 Yarra Yering Malbec. "I knew there and then malbec had to be one of the grapes I would grow," says Govan.

The third (and most important) epiphany came in 2002 when Govan was given a glass of 1999 Vosne-Romanee Les Suchots of Burgundy's Domaine Confuron-Cotetidot. "I was dumbstruck as the scales fell off my eyes," he says. So it is that the superb wine list at the Victory Hotel is catholic in its breadth, but has a selection of the best Australian pinots and, even closer to Govan's heart, Burgundies.

As one does, he got the cuttings for his vineyard from some of his mates. It pays to have friends in the right places.

Rudderless Sellicks Hill Grenache 2010

Excellent colour for grenache, vibrant crimson-purple, and what follows doesn't disappoint: the bouquet is very fragrant, in tune with the bright red fruits of the palate; silky tannins run through its length. All this at 13.5% alcohol. Cellaring potential? Yes, but why stand by and wait for the wine to lose its vibrancy? The cuttings came from d'Arenberg and Seppeltsfield (1998), Rockford and Shottesbrooke (2000). Screwcap.

96 points; drink to 2018; \$35

Rudderless Sellicks Hill Shiraz Malbec 2010

Even at its most southerly point, McLaren Vale still stamps its terroir on its wines with that dark chocolate character. This wine brings malbec's plummy fruit into play, joining with the shiraz to bring a juicy energy and supple flow to the wine, and its lively finish. The shiraz came from cuttings collected by Govan from Paxton, Torbreck and Leasingham (1998) and Greenock Creek, Torbreck and Pirramimma (2000). 13.5% alc; screwcap.

94 points; drink to 2025; \$35

Rudderless Sellicks Hill Malbec 2010

Dense purple-crimson, it has plum jam to burn, with some traces of spice and licorice in the background; the tannins are very soft, the finish not especially long. The cuttings came from Langhorne Creek and Leasingham (1998). 13.5% alc; screwcap.

92 points; drink to 2017; \$35

