

**THE AUSTRALIAN**

# Rudderless Vineyard Malbec 2015, McLaren Vale: Mum's word sums it all up after one sip

By **NICK RYAN**

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My mother is all about first impressions. She prides herself on her ability to quickly grasp a person's true nature and nail it to the wall.

She tastes wine in much the same way.

Spending a few days drinking with the family at its full Easter extension is a study in the fluent ease of the gifted amateur and the overcomplication of the so-called pro.

My mother's like that kid working weekends as a greenkeeper who strolls up to the first tee and bombs a monster drive 400 yards while the pro is still tangled up with biometrics, complex swing mechanics and trying to find a Texta to mark his balls. She'll take her first sip from a glass of wine and instantly latch on to a single defining characteristic that marks the wine in her mind, like an old-fashioned conductor clipping a ticket.

She's got the well-honed palate of an instinctive cook who relies on an understanding of flavour rather than strict adherence to recipe.

She has no need for the elaborate vocabulary of wine from which her son makes his living. One wine will prompt "raspberries", another evokes "quinces" while a third gets "those lavender sachets your nana kept in her knicker drawer".

This single-entry cataloguing system is remarkably effective when it comes to remembrance of wines past.

Sometime in the late 1970s my parents drank a bottle of Wolf Blass Black Label, exact vintage forgotten but it was one of the triumvirate from 1973, 1974 and 1975 that won a hat-trick of Jimmy Watson trophies and made Blass and his right-hand man John Glaetzer legends.

Decades later Mum still talks about that wine, its singular impact still resonates.

She'd never tasted a wine that reminded her of a Coconut Rough chocolate before and every wine in the decades since in which she's found that character instantly retrieves that old Black Label from the depths of her sensory memory.

What she was tasting was flavour impact from new American oak barrels.

Glaetzer is famous for his winemaking mantra “no wood, no good”. It will one day be carved on his headstone.

A hell of a lot of wines in the 1980s and 90s were shaped in that image and every time my mother would taste one, we were subjected to the story of that ancient Black Label once again.

I can't help wondering if her method of wine assessment might be more effective than mine.

While she's happily grabbing a single illuminating characteristic in her glass, then getting on with enjoying it, I'm wading through the same wine, looking for layers, digging for nuance and uncovering clues that might indicate I actually know what I'm doing.

That's partly because I'd go broke trying to make a living as the wine writer who delivered single-word assessments on booze. When you get paid by the word, complexity is cash.

And wine is a many-splendoured thing, the fact that eight different people can get a glass from the same bottle and each experience it in their own way is what makes it special.

But it helps those of us who spend their working lives wearing rose-coloured glass to be reminded than wine can be a source of singular truths as well.

## Rudderless Vineyard Malbec 2015, McLaren Vale \$35

“Roses,” says Mum. She's right, of course.

There is the that beautiful floral scent malbec can get when its tendency to herbaceousness is defeated by good site selection and responsive winemaking that allows it to blossom and bloom.

I tried telling Mum how it comes from the vineyard wine-obsessed publican Doug Govan planted across Sellicks Hill behind his iconic Victory Hotel.

I tried telling her how that site helps deliver a range of dark, brambly fruit characters and gorgeously fine tannins that make you think of what might happen if someone invented a way of making lozenges from pumice stone.

I tried telling her how the wine's suppleness and finely detailed architecture would make it the perfect match for lamb we had splayed out on an Asado frame for Easter Sunday lunch.

“Yep, roses. I think I might need to order a case.”

And then the bottle was gone.

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Lisle

APR 3, 2018

This reminds me of an invitation to attend a function which would include a wine tasting competition here in Sydney.

The guests included financial experts and investors, who from their upstart conversation also believed themselves to be wine experts.

The time arrived for the wine tasting, so having crook knees at the time, and it was nothing to do with me, I found myself a chair away from the crowd leaving my husband to endure the wine tasting competition. His expertise is in drinking wine- not analyzing it.

After sometime, I was on my feet again and made my way back to the competition which I discovered was down to two men, one of whom was my husband who consequently won, because he picked the part of Victoria from which the wine had been grown..

More staggering was the fact that amongst this sophisticated gathering, over half the competitors were eliminated in the first round when they didn't know the difference between Riesling and Chardonnay.

My husband survived half a dozen rounds of wine. Later basking in his win, the wine cellar's chap told him he must have a good memory for wines, similar to Nick's mum.

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**Jim**

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Good one, Andrew!!

1 LIKE REPLY

**Andrew**

APR 3, 2018

Maybe The Australian should get your Mum to write a column?

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**Andrew**

APR 3, 2018

@Andrew It would be very short.

1 LIKE REPLY

**Jayne**

APR 3, 2018

@Andrew Sort perhaps but to the point. Buy a case or not. Sometimes that's all that's needed. She's on the money for me

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