

giaconda

THE MONA LISA OF PINOT



On a recent fly-fishing trip to the Victorian Alps region with my colleagues Grant and Ian it soon became evident that a visit to the Giaconda winery was not only appropriate but mandatory especially since the trout were scarce but the wine plentiful. Giaconda Vineyard

and winery is situated nine kilometres southwest of Beechworth on the Wangaratta Road in North-eastern Victoria, in the foothills and within sight of the Victorian Alps.

On our arrival we were greeted by Nathan Kinzbrunner who, as it turned out, was one of the most pleasant and approachable cellar hosts I have met in a long time. For the inquisitive mind 'Giaconda' derives from 'La Gioconda', which is the lesser known title of the world famous painting 'Mona Lisa' ['My Lisa'] by Leonardo da Vinci. The feminine definite article 'la' means 'the'. The feminine adjective 'gioconda', used as a noun, means 'mirthful, joyous, jocund, gay, cheery'. The phrase is pronounced 'lah joh-KOHN-dah'.

Giaconda, created by former mechanical engineer Rick Kinzbrunner in 1980, has perhaps some of the most sought after wines in Australia and overseas - especially the Chardonnay and its much famed Pinot Noir which are legendary and sell out before release every November "en-Premiur".

Nathan was kind enough to let us barrel sample the outstanding 2011 Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in the new iso-climatic underground ageing room, which turned out to be a tunnel dug into granite. The constant 14-17 degrees Celsius makes for a slow and undisturbed maturation process that allows the wines to retain freshness with complexity. The wines are handcrafted in the case of the

Chardonnay and Pinot Noir using traditional Burgundian methods and of course top quality French oak.

For me the highlight was the barrel tasting of the 2010 and 2011 Nebiollas, which it appears, has become a passion for Rick from his Red Hill site in Beechworth. The soil is a granitic loam over decomposed gravel and clay. The clay is important allowing sustained water-release to the vine roots; while the soil, being not too rich, is ideal for wine quality as yields are naturally regulated; approximate harvest being limited to two tonnes per acre. The vines are drip irrigated in some years only when necessary to prevent stress.

At an altitude of 400 metres (1330 feet) the site, which is a south facing slope so that the vines do not receive the direct impact of the sun's rays, is relatively cool.

Vintage occurs between mid-March and mid-April depending on the season with the grapes being handpicked in the cool of the early morning.

2010 Yarra Valley & Beechworth Pinot Noir

This wine displayed beautiful deep aromatics of cherry and exotic spices with characters of forest floor evident on both the nose and palate. The wine has a rich, savoury and powerful palate, followed by grippy tannins and lingering acidity. Showing great balance with perfect weight the wine has 13.5% alcohol. This wine is of course a blend of Beechworth and Yarra Valley fruit. In short, this wine is indeed the Mona Lisa of Pinot.



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hang on AT SHAKEY TABLES

The Hunter Valley is indeed recognised as the birthplace of the multi-billion dollar-a-year wine making industry renowned for its full-bodied white wines, 'medium weight reds' and some excellent ports.

If visiting the Hunter you will eventually find Rothbury, on the northern edge of the Pokolbin district, where you will come across Paula Rengger who operates the Hunter Country Lodge and Shakey Tables Restaurant with her husband Simon. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Paula trained as a jeweller and silversmith at the Edinburgh College of Art before migrating to Australia.



The walls are hung with her paintings, but Paula also expresses her creative energy through her menu, using ingredients that she calls "a bit on the edge". She also likes to "break a few rules", and admits that "because of my art school background, I often work with the visual concept of how I want something to look."

In terms of accommodation, it is blissfully quiet and you will wake up to beautiful birdsong and grazing kangaroos. Your accommodation is set amongst vineyards and 100 acres of lush, native bushland. Situated in the centre of the lodge is their award winning restaurant, Shakey Tables. The assortment of classic tables and colourful chairs, contrasting with Paula's modern art, sets a style that gives their restaurant it's name.

Chef Paula Rengger's menu is classically inspired contemporary Australian, creatively interpreted, influenced by her Scottish heritage and cooked with honesty and passion. For entrée there is a choice Sesame crusted sashimi tuna with smoked eel,

cucumber jelly, pickled cucumber, horseradish crème fraiche and flying fish roe or Pigeon poached in Chinese stock, then fried in tempura batter, pickled vegetables, chilli jam along with a range of other tempting entrées.

For the Mains there is of course Paula's Pork 3 ways belly with sage and onion jam, braised cheek with muscat jus, trotter and ear croquette with caramelized apple, colcannon mash with and bacon. Alternatively, there is the Wagyu beef bavette bourguignon, lardons, spring onions, Yorkshire pudding or the Poached ocean trout with kipfler potato, swiss brown mushrooms and mussels in a saffron cream, pancetta, roe.

For Dessert, you must try the Cranachan - a traditional Scottish wedding dessert comprising Raspberry, toasted oatmeal and honey ice cream terrine with whisky and almond praline filled tuile cigars. Shakey Tables is open 7 nights from 6.30pm and open for lunch on Saturday and Sunday.



Hunter Country Lodge & Shakey Tables Restaurant
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