

Playing red

McLaren Vale shows its hand with another classic variety, this time the endearing and adaptable grenache.

THE first red wine I purchased was a flagon of Hardys Dry Red – McLaren Vale grenache, mataro and shiraz. It came from the Crafers bottle-o, which had a handy thicket of shrubbery in which a youthful vagrant could practise his tasting with blind impunity. I shall never forget the intensity of that blend, preserved forever under screw cap.

Twenty years later, Peter the Greek let me ravage his cellar of Chateau Reynella Burgundy in the Tanunda pub. Same varieties, but then, in the late '80s, this was bottled stuff from the mid-'70s. At 15 or so years, corks permitting, it was delicious.

These grand blends led to the idea of Cadenzia, a brand to be shared by the winemakers of McLaren Vale, sponsored by the new, locally developed Zork closure, which I was encouraging. The guarantee was that there would be more grenache in the bottle than any other variety.

Walter Clappis, of Amicus Wines, generously donated to his neighbourly rivals the Cadenza name, which he owned but hadn't used. (A cadenza is a passage of scored music where the principal player improvises.) In the spirit of having a jam, McLaren Vale added an i, and off it went.

The second wave of Cadenzias is appearing now, and while some versions are not yet bottled, I have eight models on the table, four of which are straight grenache. Grenache comes from Spain (where it's called garnacha) or Sardinia, (where it's called cannonau). The French call it grenache noir.

Mataro is a Spanish town where the monastrell variety grows. To confuse the issue, the French call this grape mourvedre while, until recently, Australia always called it mataro.

The two varieties marry perfectly, the rosy sheen of grenache – it's almost Turkish delight – adding polish to the meaty density of mataro.

But seriously, you can blend grenache with nearly anything. It makes rather fetching rosé. Maybe those straight grenache Cadenzias miss the point. It's about boogie on the blending bench. But if they want to blow the trumpet for their fab old grenache block, that's cool, too.

McLaren Vale's proximity to the gulf named St Vincent – patron of viticulturers – sets it apart from other major regions because its constant maritime humidity gives softer, more soulful flavours than places with drier air, like the Mallee, Clare or Barossa. And the Vales wines from sandy soils (which aren't marine but the last remnants of the huge mountains of prehistory) seem to stand out for various reasons.

I didn't taste these blind, so my points are to argue with, not accept. Make your own points.

d'Arenberg Cadenzia 2003 (93 points; \$25; 14.5 per cent alcohol; Zork; grenache, shiraz, mourvedre). Vibrant wine, with deep prune and mulberry fruits,



dense lignite at the bottom and faintly minty top notes – old vines make all the difference. Like the Yangarra, there's plenty of tannin – mourvedre? – to assure miracles in the cellar.

Dog Ridge Cadenzia 2004 (91 points; \$22; 15.5 per cent alcohol; Zork; grenache, shiraz, petit verdot, chardonnay). Licorice, aniseed and musk give the top notes to this cube, which is one of the more zany blends of the day. Below those pretty decorations, it's all prunes and cream, deep, intense, furry – it reminds me of Vacqueyras, on the Rhone.

Foggo Cadenzia 2004 (92 points; \$20; 14.6 per cent alcohol; cork; grenache). Ninety-year-old vines in sand help this smell like a Cherry Ripe made with Val du Rhone chocolate, adding to all those roses, musk and mulberry. It's deliciously viscous, then velvety – gloriously honest, gentle history you can drink. Why blend when you grow this?

Gemtree Cadenzia 2004 (93 points; \$25; 15 per cent alcohol; screw cap; grenache, tempranillo, shiraz). Lovely tapas/antipasto/charcuterie meats are the go in this bouquet: it makes me hungry. The palate's quite spicy – think mace – and the spicity polished leather of that tempranillo really gives a point of difference. Get down.

Penny's Hill Cadenzia 2004 (91 points; \$20; 15 per cent alcohol; Zork; grenache). Very heady and dark indeed, this is a rather grand grenache, made more

as the full-bodied dry red cheddar cheese accompanist than to loosen the grape's more humorous and lascivious aspects. It's tweeds. Adelaide Club.

Red Knot Cadenzia 2004 (92 points; \$14; 14.5 per cent alcohol; Zork; grenache, shiraz). This is the Beaujolais Cadenzia: one made juicy and audacious for the early slurper. It's intense, mind you, with shots of fennel and whatnot, but it's largely dead slippery, silky, juicy fruit. Very naughty.

Ill Associates Cadenzia 2003 (91 points; \$17; 14.5 per cent alcohol, cork; grenache). Seventy-year-old vines give deep, soulful, leather and soy aromas to this lovely thing; the palate's smooth and silky, with very fine drying tannins. Beautiful, big, succulent dry red.

Yangarra Cadenzia 2003 (95 points, \$28; 15.8 per cent alcohol; Zork; grenache, shiraz, mourvedre). Old vines in Blewitt Springs sands give mellow moss and spicy peat hints to the deep cooking chocolate intensity of this blend. After that, the furry velvet tannins come as a bit of a surprise. It's wicked now, but it will be better with some serious cellar.

So there. You can argue about these for yonks. A bottle each among mates and neighbours and you've got your own blind tasting. Get the GSMs out, the Barossa blends, and Clare, and to the tune of *Barbara Ann*, sing go go go, go go grenache.

Eleven of McLaren Vale's most respected wine producers celebrate their new vintages of Cadenzia grenache during October, with cellar-door releases and tastings throughout the month. For details, go to www.mclarenvale.info/cadenzia

Below: Cadenzia collaborators, Foggo Wines' Sandie and Herb Van de Wiel.

