

Winemaker Profile

VICKY- LOUISE BARTIER - BAROSSA VALLEY

It was in October 1999 when Mal Williams contacted me to say he had found a wine, which would be perfect for the *Small Winemakers' Tasting Dozens*. This is just the news one likes to hear. He said that while at a tasting with one of his colleagues, Chris Young, of Young and Rashleigh wine distributors, both of them were gob-smacked as they dealt with a Semillon simultaneously. "We just looked at each other, thinking the same thought: whose wine is that?" The wine was Yunbar Estate Bushvines Semillon 1999. "It simply stood out in the line up", was Mal's comment. Grateful for the tip, this wine, when seen was immediately included in the November Dozen. (The 2000 version was in the February Dozen this year).

Communication with Vicky is beyond E-mails nowadays, and her own winemaking journey, for me, is taking shape. Conversation is easily the best form of communication! And as she says "winemaking is a strange vocation for anyone."

Vicky graduated with a Degree in Oenology (Winemaking) from Roseworthy Agricultural College in South Australia in 1988. There was a condescending attitude toward women winemakers in those days, which I can vouch for, having been there only a little earlier. The world was changing a bit too quickly for some peddlers of knowledge, particularly in this traditional male-club establishment, in an Industry of the same flavour. The point simply, is that Vicky overcame this convoluted support and wayward encouragement to become Premium White Wine and Sparkling Winemaker for Orlando Wyndham. Thank God for the differences.

From Roseworthy it was to work at Hordens Wybong Park Winery in the Upper Hunter. It was only a short stay as the Winery was sold in 1989, and was to become known as Reynold's Yarraman.

It was time to explore the 'big volume' world of wine in the Riverina. There were shortish stints with Miranda Wines, De Bortoli and Riverina Wines. Next was the corporate world of wine making at Orlando Wyndham's Wickham Hill, also in Griffith. This was no accident. In a way the winemaking world is fairly small and if someone is doing "good things", eventually they will be noticed. Vicky was "invited" to apply for the Orlando Wyndham job.

Significantly, this position put her into a new orbit. It opened up the distant horizon of the Barossa Valley, and Orlando Wyndham's operational heartbeat at Rowland Flat. And in 1995 Vicky began working with other winemakers on the company's premium wines. Wines like the St. Hilary Chardonnay, St. Helga Riesling and so on. It was also at this address that big steps were taken on both a conscious and idealistic plane. The story goes that during the first vintage, Vicky had the responsibility to direct the pressed juice to either barrel or stainless steel for fermentation. Along company lines and practice she would make the cut accordingly. The quality of a batch of Semillon impressed her so much it heightened her decision mode to a point a "journal entry" was entered. Earmarked for Jacobs

Creek, Vicky simply couldn't do it. Instead she directed the juice to 20 quality barrels of both French and American origin, the equivalent of about 500 case of wine.

Somewhere down the track there was going to be trouble. Big companies don't have much in the way of a sense of humour. 'Trouble' happened. But it was a decision based on quality, and the eventual quality of the wine made for the initial release of Orlando Wyndham Richmond Grove Barossa Semillon. A good result for all concerned!

Time itself though, in big companies becomes the enemy to those who possess a free creative spirit that needs expression. Eventually you believe it when you say to yourself 'I can't do it any more'. Upon resigning, "I threw away my alarm clock."

The quality of 'that' Semillon was integral as well, in the first vintage of Yunbar Bushvines Semillon. Typically that "creative spirit" leads a good winemaker to have the last word on the finished wine. Vicky believes the wood treatment was overdone. Far too oaky, but the wood was still unable to hide the quality of the fruit. The mind was focusing.

Yunbar Semillon is made from old bushvines (70 and 90 year old) from local Barossa growers. "I only want a little bit of oak to give it a bit of structure, complexity and something to help it aging because I think unoaked Barossa Semillon doesn't tend to age that well. In the Barossa everyone is making Semillon that's 13.5 baume, and that is very alcoholic. It was full malo and using heavily toasted barrels was sacrilegious to me. It's supposed to be lemony and citrus and lean." Vicky, like many, is a devotee of the Hunter style of Semillon from the 1960s and 1970s, and that is the way she tries to make it.

Vicky describes Yunbar Estate as "a modest family owned Wine Company that produces wines from the picturesque Barossa Valley." The wines are thoughtful, handcrafted and very definitely individual. "Yunbar's philosophy is to make the best varietal single vineyard Barossa Valley wines possible, allowing them to have their own distinct bouquet, flavour and character."

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**Quotes regarding the handling of Semillon are Vicky's as told and recorded in "Crushed By Women" by Jeni Port. Used with permission.