

HOT 100

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Clare Riesling: the Penna finally drops

-BY CHARLES GENT-

Back-label blurbs love to hype the notion of tradition, often where none exists. But for Clare Valley vigneron Peter Treloar and his Penna Lane label, tradition is no idle marketing ploy – it breathes down his neck at every vintage.

Francis Treloar, Peter's direct ancestor, was one of the Clare Valley's earliest winemakers. The vineyards of Treloar's Prospect at Watervale were established in 1865 and Francis sold his early wines from the barrel in the Watervale Hotel. Treloar's Springvale Cellars would go on to achieve fame under the management of Carl Sobels and Hermann Buring, father of Leo: as Quelltaler, the winery became the source both of an internationally celebrated "hock" and one of Australia's best known sherries, Granfiesta. Following considerable expansion and shifts of ownership in recent decades, the winery became Eaglehawk (yes, you do detect a whiff of Wolf Blass) before mutating into its current manifestation as Annie's Lane.

Fittingly, it was Watervale fruit that propelled a Penna Lane wine into the Top 10 of the Adelaide Review's latest Hot 100 Wines. And to ice the cake, the 2015 Penna Lane Skilly Valley Riesling, grown around the winery's home vineyard, also earned a Hot 100 berth.

Treloar says although he didn't grow up in Clare, he has always been conscious of the family legacy. After an initial foray into

winegrowing in the 1980s as a partner in Heritage Wines, a Clare venture that eventually migrated to the Barossa, Treloar was engaged in early wine exportation to China before returning to the home of his ancestors with the purchase of vineyards in the Skilly Valley. This picturesque strip of land, a few kilometres west of the main road south of Clare, is also home to local notables Skillogalee, Mitchell and Killikanoon.

At 450 metres above sea level, the home block is planted to Shiraz, Cabernet and Semillon in roughly equal four-hectare lots. Fruit for the Skilly Valley Riesling comes from neighbouring growers, while grapes for the Watervale variant originate a few kilometres to the south.

"Our Watervale block is down at Leasingham, and is, coincidentally, an old Quellaler block, although unfortunately not with the original vines," Treloar quips.

Penna Lane buys its grapes from grower Anthony Koerner, whose vines are 35 to 40 years old and grown, Treloar says, in "lovely, deep, rich loamy soils".

The vines are irrigated only when hot and dry conditions make it necessary – "I don't think too many taps are being turned on this season," Treloar says – and the winemaking follows a time-honoured model that keeps sweetness at arm's length.

"Clare is known – and we keep trying to push it – for its beautifully dry Rieslings," Treloar says. "The beauty of Riesling is its pure fruit. Clare has warm days with clear skies that ripen the fruit, with cool nights that settle everything down and develop the acids and keep the vines in good condition."

Treloar and winemaker Chris Proud see themselves as Clare makers (and drinkers) with a keen sense of tradition. Since 2010, they have joined a small club of local winemakers who have dedicated themselves to keeping the local version of Semillon afloat, in a bid to maintain a wine style that can be traced back to – no surprises – the glory days of Quelltaler.

"We understand that Clare does the classics very well. There's nothing wrong with exploring new varieties, but I think it would be a big mistake to walk away from what has been the basis of Clare for many years," Treloar says.

There is good news on that front: while a popular resurgence of Riesling has been vainly predicted for decades, Treloar says recent increases in sales do indeed suggest an upward swing in appreciation for the noble grape.

"I think they're finally waking up."



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