

# ***These come from the land Down Under***

***By Geoff Last, For The Calgary Herald August 29, 2010***

I would like to state for the record that the title of this column has absolutely nothing to do with defunct Australian rock bands or kookaburras, whatever those are.

As Australia struggles to redefine its wine industry, it has been forced to cast an introspective glance at diversity, or perhaps lack thereof.

Wine-producing countries simply cannot put all of their eggs in one basket, because sooner or later people will want different eggs.

Shiraz is not the only game in town, of course, but it has dominated the Australian wine landscape for decades now.

I think it is safe to say that Shiraz will always be a specialty, especially in the Barossa Valley, but alternate varieties -- such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache -- are going to become much more commonplace.

Here are a few examples that illustrate that point quite admirably:

***Diggers Bluff Sly Dog Cabernet Sauvignon 2007, Barossa Valley -- (\$27)***

Diggers Bluff produces a small range of handmade wines from the Barossa Valley, most of which are of high quality and relatively well-priced. This is rich, full-bodied Cabernet showing notes of cassis and mocha with hints of minerals and a nice amount of new wood.

Like most Cabernet, it would go well with red meat such as beef, lamb or bison. The winery's web-site suggests pairing the wine with roast beef with Vegemite gravy. I suggest you do so at your own risk.

***Ram's Leap Semillon/ Sauvignon Blanc 2008, New South Wales -(\$18)***

Ram's Leap is essentially a second-tier project from Cannonbah Bridge, a very good producer based in the Western Plains region of the country. The blending of Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc is a specialty of Bordeaux, but good examples of this pairing can be found from elsewhere with increasing regularity. The Semillon contributes a fat, almost oily characteristic to counter the zesty, high-acid notes of the Sauvignon Blanc. This wine would go well with shellfish, grilled asparagus or simply as an aperitif.

***Skulls 2007 Red Wine, South Eastern Australia -(\$27)***

Skulls is one of the numerous releases from R Wines, a project that involves superstar wine-maker Chris Ringland -- among others -- and U.S. importer The Grateful Palate. The wine is a blend of 60 per cent Grenache and 40 per cent Mourvedre and offers loads of bright red cherry fruit with some nice spice and a hint of earth and minerals. This is a versatile red wine that is gutsy enough to stand up to most red meats, but elegant enough to work with dishes such as grilled chicken, pork and mild curries. Geoff Last is a longtime Calgary wine merchant and writer and a regular contributor to City Palate and other publications. He instructs on food and wine at the Cookbook Company Cooks.