

# THE ELEGANT BLOCKBUSTER

While everybody else is chasing Parker points, Grant Burge's wine has the ultimate seal of approval – a letter of praise from the Archbishop of Adelaide, which helped to get the wine through US customs, and a recommendation from the Archbishop of Canterbury. With the Church on its side, what could possibly go wrong?

Grant Burge The Holy Trinity GSM			
www.grantburgewines.com.au			
Prices in the four major export markets			
Market	Local price	in €	in US \$
USA	\$39.00	25.00	39.00
Canada	CA\$39.95	25.00	39.00
UK	£14.50	18.39	28.60
Japan	¥4,500	26.00	41.00
Production:	5,000 cases		
Export:	70%		
Major Export Markets:	USA, Canada, UK, Japan		

If today the words 'Barossa' and 'Shiraz' are practically synonymous, it's because of a small group of winemakers who decided back in the 1980s that Shiraz had something to offer. In those days, the only grape in town was Cabernet Sauvignon and commentators were happy to say that the region itself was only fit for growing cabbages, or grazing horses.

One of the winemakers who wanted to turn that around was Grant Burge. He, along with colleagues like Robert O'Callaghan from Rockford, consciously decided to put the Barossa on the wine map by creating wines based on old vine Shiraz.

Today, the Barossa Valley and its dense, inky Shiraz are doing so well, that other Australian winemakers lament they can't get the world to understand that not all Australian wine is of blockbuster proportions. Grant Burge Wines has also done well, being Australia's seventeenth biggest exporter and eighteenth biggest wine company, employing around 100 people and producing 250,000 cases of wine. Which is why it's something

of a surprise to discover that Burge's most successful wine in the US is not an old vine Shiraz at all, but a blend of Rhône Valley varieties, Grenache, Shiraz and Mourvedre.

It's not like Burge doesn't have good Shiraz to offer. In his own, self-named Icon Wines category, at the top of his range, there is the one of Australia's most highly regarded Shirazes, the Meschach. In the second tier, the Wines of Distinction, is the Filsell Shiraz, also greatly admired within Australia. But, somehow, these wines have failed to ignite in the all-important US market, where Robert Parker's love affair with old vine Shiraz has seen wines from Burge's neighbours achieve cult status and correspondingly high prices. ("We don't seek Parker points," Burge's staff will tell you sternly.)

But enter the Holy Trinity Grenache Shiraz Mourvedre, first created after Burge visited the Rhône Valley in the mid 1990s. That trip inspired him to create a blend that could eventually become as associated with the Barossa as Shiraz itself. And, like the region's most famous wines, it too is built on old vine material.

"The fruit for Holy Trinity comes from five vineyards," says Burge. "The youngest is 50 years old and the oldest, which represents about 40% of the wine, was planted in the 1890s."

Burge says the Grenache gives a "beautiful, vibrant, rose petal bouquet", the Mourvedre is "clove like", while the Shiraz adds structure. As to why he began making it in the first place, he says he was specifically looking to create a wine style that would be a Barossa icon within the next 50 years and he chose those three grapes because they were the original

red varieties of the Barossa. "We went to the Rhône a couple of times to study how to make those wines," he says. "I just wanted to understand their perception, not copy them, but also to see what their thinking was and whether it would work in Australia."

The name, incidentally, comes from the old Anglican church that's a short distance from where the Burge family settled in the 1850s, and which was partially built by them.

The wine itself is made in a smoothly integrated, more classical style, and it's become Burge's best received wine in the US. The reason it's so successful, suggests one of Burge's staff, is because "it's a discovery product and people are looking for new hooks, because they're getting sick of very big wines. It's a very consumable wine. You can drink a whole bottle".

Grant Burge himself says it may be because of the Old World style and elegant packaging, and also because the Australian category is flooded with Shiraz and Cabernet Shiraz blends. "And interestingly we have been told that the fact that the wine was blessed by the Archbishop of Canterbury is also a selling point!" he adds. "Seems that alcohol is perhaps not a sin if the product has been approved by the higher order."

And those maligned Parker points? The Holy Trinity got them anyway – a 91. With both God and Parker on side, it's no wonder the wine sells well.



# SPANISH BLOOD

When Enrique Forner founded Marques de Caceres in the late 1960s, it was the first new bodega in Rioja in over 50 years. Today the palatial estate in Cenicero sells wine to the four corners of the world.

Caceres Rioja Crianza			
<a href="http://www.marquesdecaceres.com">www.marquesdecaceres.com</a>			
Prices in the three major markets			
Market	Local price	in €	in US \$
USA	\$14.99	9.69	14.99
UK	£8.99	11.45	17.70
Norway	NOK110	13.70	21.20
Mexico	MXN 175	10.95	16.95
Production:	500,000 cases		
Export:	50%		
Major Markets:	USA, UK, Norway, Mexico		

When produced in a traditional way, Rioja is easily recognised by its aroma, flavour and taste. Some purists, however, believe that this hallowed style of Rioja is in danger of being eclipsed, as an international, but less personal Rioja emerges, favoured by a public nurtured on New World wines.

Interestingly, some of the innovators of yesteryear are today counted as traditionalists. One of those is Marques de Caceres. Founded in the late 1960s, Enrique Forner had the advantage of being assisted by the renowned oenologist Emile Peynaud, who knew his family as the owners of Châteaux Camensac and Larose Trintaudon in Bordeaux.

In fact, much of what the two did was new for the time, including not only the introduction of new oak, but also French barrels. Today, there are 40,000 barrels



in the cellar, which gives the winery a New World dimension not uncommon in Rioja, where many producers ship millions of bottles each year.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Marques de Caceres was on the cutting edge of the much needed modernisation that transfigured Rioja. Today, that spirit of innovation has matured to a level of tradition. What has remained is an extremely professional operation with a recognisable style and clear marketing strategy.

‘Crianza’ is for many abroad a word with little intrinsic meaning. Based on the Latin meaning ‘to raise’, as one would a child, it describes a comparatively young wine that has spent only a year in barrel and about the same time in bottle before it is released, which means that a cellar like Caceres always has ten million bottles in stock maturing to meet future demand.

Ideally, traditional Rioja comes from old, bush-pruned vineyards at reduced yields. In contrast to the more modern styles, the alcohol level is relatively moderate because the grapes are not picked at inflated levels of ripeness. Further, these are seldom single varietal wines, but blends that add to the elegance of the predominant Tempranillo by teasing the warmth out of Garnacha and the nerve out of Graciano. Often slightly brick red in colour, these wines have aromas that are never fruit driven, but rather a mature bouquet of leather, spices and forest floors.

“Our competitors vary from one market to another,” says Luis Burgueño, export sales manager for Marques de Caceres, “but I would say that Montecillo, El Coto and Campo Viejo are the main ones.” Few of the other acclaimed wineries produce the same volume - and that is the essence of a brand.



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