

February 2-Pack: A Trip Down Under!
\$39 for the Pair (regularly \$22 & \$29 respectively)

The history of viticulture in Australia dates back to the earliest arrival of colonial settlers from Great Britain in 1788. The cargo manifest of that First Fleet includes grape vines alongside fruit and citrus trees, vegetables, grains, seeds and tobacco. In those early years, cuttings came from nurseries in England, where the landed gentry collected “exotic” plants; in time, entrepreneurs who recognized the potential for vine growing also recognized the need for quality, and varied, plant material, and cuttings from all over France, Germany, Spain and Portugal were imported. By the 1860s and ‘70s the colony had a thriving wine industry: the local gold rush brought new settlers; the steam age allowed wineries to increase production and transport; and the phylloxera epidemic in Europe opened an export market. Phylloxera was initially discovered in Australia in 1877, but officials recognized immediately the need to mitigate its spread: strict quarantine regulations were put into place, and while many early colonial vineyards were promptly ripped up, they were soon replanted on phylloxera-proof American root stock.

The last 50 years have been a rollercoaster for Australian Wine, or at least for its international image. In the 1960s and 1970s, vinegrowers and winemakers began working in some of Australia’s cooler climate regions, like Margaret River, Tasmania and Adelaide Hills. The high quality, small production wines they were releasing garnered attention, elevating the profile of Australian wine. The press took note, and exports increased. In the 1990s and early 2000s, a tangled relationship between points-based reviews and (predominately American) consumers led to a trend of extracted wines with high alcohol and residual sugar, establishing the stereotype of South Australian Shiraz that persists today. However, encouraging trends in the last decade away from scores and toward fresher, more balanced wines finally mean we, too, can enjoy the deliciously bright, toned, and exciting wines that Australians have been drinking all along.

Both of our wines this month feature Viognier, a 21st century star of Australian winemaking. It first appeared in Australia in the 1970s; since 2000, plantings have increased tenfold. A notoriously difficult grape to harvest, Viognier has a tight and unforgiving window of ripeness: pick too early, and it is bitter and flat; but pick too late, and it is unctuous and tired. Originally brought to France’s Rhône Valley by the Romans, Viognier has found a happy home in the vineyards of South Australia, where it produces charming, aromatic white wines with good structure and fresh acidity. In the Northern Rhône, where the vineyards of Côte-Rôtie have plantings of Viognier scattered throughout, Viognier often gets harvested alongside, and fermented with, Syrah; this co-fermentation enhances the color and softens the tannins of Syrah.



Yalumba ‘Organic’ Viognier 2021 (\$22 regularly)

Owned by the Hill-Smith family since 1849, Yalumba is now in its sixth generation in Eden Valley. Viognier pioneers in the 20th century, they are now sustainability pioneers, striving to make organically farmed wine accessible at every price point. This stainless steel fermented white is medium bodied and shows notes of stone fruit, citrus and tree blossoms.

d’Arenberg ‘Laughing Magpie’ Shiraz-Viognier 2018 (\$29 regularly)

The Osborn family founded d’Arenberg winery in McLaren Vale in 1912; together with Yalumba’s Hill-Smith family they make up one third of ‘Australia’s First Families of Wine’. For the Laughing Magpie, a small amount of Viognier (usually less than 5%) is added to the Shiraz; the grapes are foot-stomped and then basket pressed into old French and American oak to finish fermentation. The finished wine is very perfumed, with classic slightly savory notes from the Viognier, including ripe stone fruits and plump berries.