

Collection Connection

WINE+STYLE

MARK HAWTHORNE

JULY 22nd 2011

Mark Hawthorne asks leading winemakers what's filling their glasses - and cellars - these days.



Peter Gago, the chief winemaker at Penfolds, nominates St Henri as a cellar favourite.

One often quoted and much lamented statistic about wine consumption is that 90 per cent of vino sold each year is drunk before the next vintage is released. Such buying habits are the driving force behind modern, easy-drinking wine styles, but the premium end of the market remains dominated by wines intended for a lengthy stay in the cellar.

Australian wineries cover a vast array of regions, terroir and climactic variations, so keeping tabs on just what to put down each vintage can be a daunting task.

To assist, *Wine+Style* spoke to some of Australia's leading wine-makers, all renowned for making wines that stand the test of time.

The first is Peter Gago, chief winemaker at Penfolds. This year Gago was named at No. 29 on *Decanter* magazine's list of the 50 most influential people in the world of wine.

PETER GAGO

If there is one person in the country qualified to comment on wines to cellar, it's the one entrusted to make Grange. Gago is just the fourth person to hold the esteemed position of chief winemaker at Penfolds since the appointment of Max Schubert in 1948. Surprisingly, it's some of the other wines in the Penfolds stable that are taking pride of place in his own cellar, including the 2006 vintage.

"For me, last year's release of St Henri, the 2006, is a wine to put down, if you can still find some of it," Gago says. "I put down quite a few magnums for special occasions. It's not only a wonderful wine, but it's also the 50th release of St Henri. Another is Penfolds Bin 389. Of late, I have been stocking up and buying a bit of the 2006 of that wine."

Gago was in France when Wine+Style tracked him down, having hosted a tasting of Penfolds wines dating back to 1952 at the Australian embassy in Paris. He said the event, attended by some of the most influential people in the world of wine, underscored just how well Australian wines cellar.

"In fact, I have to say, I am steering away from 2008 and 2009 Bordeaux reds, simply because of the pricing," Gago says. "I was there in Bordeaux recently and they are some remarkable wines, but the pricing just makes it hard to justify."

Turning to the Barossa, Gago highlights Kaesler as a winery that is producing quality reds. "I have always had a soft spot for them," he says. "The winemaker there, Reid Bosward, is making some beautiful wines - exuberant, rich Barossa reds. He has access to some very old vineyards, too. I have been putting down his Old Bastard and those sorts of things for a few years now and am very impressed with how they develop in the cellar. I would almost say you could buy any red from Kaesler at the moment and put it away for a few years."

Gago is also fond of that staple of so many Australian cellars, Wynns Black Label cabernet. "It's a wine I buy every year," he says. "A truly wonderful Australian cabernet. I probably have more of that in my cellar than any other single wine. I'm sure I'm not alone I doing that."

Asked to name a standout of his own wines, Gago names the latest 2008 release of the RWT (Red Winemaking Trial). "There is so much saturated fruit in the 2008," he says. "It will last a long time but you can also drink it tomorrow. It's an alternative Grange experience at about a third of the price. It's barrel-fermented and made in the same way as Grange - the only difference, of course, is that it's French oak rather than American oak. If you're like me, I wait until someone has a sale and I pounce and buy a case of it at 30 per cent off. It's a rich, beautiful wine that takes me back to my days when I was a long-haired student at Melbourne Uni.

"Buy a case or two and you won't have to wait 20 years to start a 20-year journey. You can start next year and drink one every 12 or 18 months or so."