

Cloudburst Dinner at Rockpool in Perth

By: Andrew Hamilton
July 20th 2016

On Monday night I had the pleasure of heading down to Rockpool Bar and Grill here in Perth for the annual Cloudburst Winery release dinner. I've been an admirer of Cloudburst wines for a few years now, specifically since I met the owner/winemaker Will Berliner and had the opportunity to look at his wines. His work in the vineyard to my knowledge is unparalleled in the Margaret River region. In fact, I don't know a single producer in the greater Margaret River region who can claim that their vineyard has never once seen a tractor besides Cloudburst. His vines are close planted Burgundy style with vines and rows equally spaced at a meter apart from one another. His approach to winemaking can easily be described as minimalist and he's a true believer that great wine comes from great fruit and as such he focuses incredible effort into producing the best fruit possible annually.

I've looked at the range of Cloudburst wines numerous times in the past few years and to my palate they are top class examples in Australia for Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, if not the world. I'd routinely reach one of Will's Cabs over most Bordeaux wines I've tried irrespective of price. And after Monday night I'm blown away by the latest vintage Malbec and I've never been a huge Malbec fan. Each wine shows well individually but looking at 8 different wines from 3 varieties over 3 vintages I'm struck by how uniformly excellent they are whilst also being distinctive and true to vintage variation year after year.

Enough of my waffling though, onto the notes! Apologies for the lack of photos but Rockpool's lighting was less than desirable and my pictures suffered as a result.

Bracket 1 - Chardonnay

2015 Cloudburst Chardonnay (1/3 new oak)

Stunning youthful nose. Excellent high toast component with ripe fruit underneath. Clean and Classy. Quite well integrated for its age. Also shows a hint of green apple.

The palate is excellent. Richly fruited, yet linear and precise. Good balance and nice acid line throughout.

2014 Cloudburst Chardonnay (1/3 new oak)

The smoke/toast component is a touch stronger. That or the fruit is showing more subtly. There's also a touch of caramel/toffee as well as green apple.

The palate is very taut and the fruit is definitely not quite as big as the 15. The smokey complexity from the oak is lovely and provides a great balance in the wine.

2013 Cloudburst Chardonnay (1/3 new oak)

Slight sulfur/struck match on the nose. Quite austere and easily the most closed of the three on the night. That said with time fruit and floral components breathe up nicely in glass.

Once again the palate is all elegance. That said much like the nose I suspect this wine is closed/in a dumb phase and will show much better with more bottle age.

Food accompaniment

Great Southern Yabbies with carrots, almonds and dates

Bracket 2 - Malbec

2014 Cloudburst Malbec (100% new oak)

Incredible richness of dark fruit on the nose without being overripe or over extracted. It also balances a class and elegance with that richness. Also shows wet tobacco and pencil shavings. Over time it opens up even more in glass,

showing dark chocolate, spices, and menthol. When I finished the glass it was showing beef stock and a lovely smokey note.

Very big and young on the palate. A baby that could really do with more time. Despite the large shoulders there's a lovely balance in the wine. The finish has a slightly drying back palate. Good length and acidity as well.

I don't drink much Malbec, but this is the best one that I've ever tasted.

2013 Cloudburst Malbec (50%-60% new oak)

A more restrained nose when compared to the 2014 but that might be due to it settling in a bit in bottle. Still there's dark fruits and a touch of green herbaceousness. There's also a hint of tomato as well as spice. With a good deal of air it really breathes up well with effusive dark fruits and cigar tobacco. Still a pup.

I'm struck by the excellent acidity on the palate as well as the dark fruits. A very juicy wine that breathes up well and could easily do with some time in the decanter. The tannin is more settled and it seems perfectly ripe and black fruited without being overdone. Lovely, elegant, and long.

Food accompaniment

Forrest Grange British White Chuck and Brisket Pie with Chipotle Chilli

Bracket 3 (Cabernet Sauvignon)

2014 Cloudburst Cabernet Sauvignon (50%-60% new oak)

Classy, elegant, and youthful. Big black fruits at excellent ripeness levels. Pencil shavings and fresh herbs. Touch of menthol/eucalypt as well as tomato leaf.

The palate is dominated by fresh black fruits. Stylish, elegant, complex and long. Great acidity, tannic in youth, but still balanced. A real wow Cabernet.

2013 Cloudburst Cabernet Sauvignon (50%-60% new oak)

Rich dark fruits and again that touch of tomato leaf. Also has quite a pretty high toned lift on the nose. With time in glass hints of dark chocolate emerge. With even more time notes of beef stock appear.

On the palate the wine just exudes a wonderful elegance. A very classy Margaret River cabernet that's clean, long, and wonderfully acidic.

2012 Cloudburst Cabernet Sauvignon (50%-60% new oak)

More opulent and richly black fruited nose when compared to the 13. Still has great poise though.

Stunning palate with a hint of alcohol. Rich with oodles of black fruits that whilst ripe still have a brightness on the palate. Good length and the tannins are settling in nicely.

Food accompaniment

Beef tasting, two cuts of Cape Grim grass fed beef

Baby Baldavis Kipfler potatoes sauteed in wagyu fat with rosemary and garlic

Creamed corn with chipotle chilli butter and manchego cheese

After the three brackets of wine and food some Pyengana Clouthbound Cheddar was served for us to finish our reds with. As stated earlier I can't emphasize how much I enjoy drinking Cloudburst wines. The combination of high acidity and ripeness without being over-oaked, overripe, or over extracted across the entire range of wines completely suit my Burgundy loving palate. These wines are consistently excellent and I would recommend them to any lover of wine. If I had any complaint on the night it would be with regards to the food at Rockpool, specifically the yabbies dish. This plate had a citrus component that really clashed with the Chardonnay. If it were up to me I would have chosen a richer or fattier dish that would have complimented the acid spine of the wine more. Still, you know you're doing all right when that's the biggest gripe you have for a wine event!