

20 APRIL 2016 – PHILIP WHITE

[HTTP://DRINKSTER.BLOGSPOT.COM/2016/04/CHEEKY-RED-TRIO-FROM-SERAFINO.HTML](http://drinkster.blogspot.com/2016/04/CHEEKY-RED-TRIO-FROM-SERAFINO.HTML)

CHEEKY RED TRIO FROM SERAFINO



Nebbiolo is named after the nebbia, the fog and mist of Italy's Piedmont, where this elegant red grape grows best in the Barolo and Barbaresco appellations.

Some of the top ones are pale enough to see your fingers through, like the prime Pinot which grows over the other side of the mountains in Burgundy.

Nebbiolo tannins seem to float above the rest of the wine's texture like a cloud. Tannin's more integrally part of the guts of the mightiest Pinots of Burgundy. Sometimes this tannin thing helps me differentiate between Barolo and Burgundy.

To an extreme, Nebbiolo is of the opposite of Shiraz, where the tannins are vital to the wine's basement; its chassis and sump.

McLaren Vale has a piedmont. It's the foot of the slope of the Willunga escarpment that runs along the fault from Kangarilla to the Victory Hotel at Sellicks. Other than that, and maybe the high relative humidity, the region's terroir wouldn't appear to have much in common with the foothills of the Italian and French Alps.



The Willunga Escarpment, McLaren Vale ... photo©Milton Wordley

So it was curiosity which led me to open this part of the trio first, combined with an expectation that it would be the lightest wine of the three.

Serafino Bellissimo McLaren Vale Nebbiolo 2014 (\$20; 13.5% alcohol; screw cap) is from a vineyard five kays from the coast, near Aldinga. This is not like Italy's Piedmont. But it highlights the Vales' tendency to grow reds rich with the cheeky, juicy aromatics of cherries (maraschino and morello) which are common traits of much fine Italian Nebbiolo, especially at modest alcohols like this.

The pickling juice of the morello quite logically opens the flavours, and then there's a rise of acidity which winemaker Charlie Whish accurately relates to rhubarb. After all that, yep, the fine tannins do seem rather disconnected.

It all sings closer to unison with plenty of air. Two hours makes a huge difference. It melds.

While this wine would play a bright and brash counterpoint to all sorts of pickled charcuterie or salumaria meats, it'd rock with the black olives in a rich puttanesca.

But it's nothing on what it'll mellow and settle into with a few years of dungeon. You'll smell strawberries poaching in Sauternes with about five cloves a serve then.

Have 'em with this wine and fresh-whipped cream at that point, a light grind of fresh black pepper over the top.

The **Serafino Bellissimo McLaren Vale Tempranillo 2015** (\$20; 14.4% alcohol; screw cap) is immediately a more in-your-face and ready-to-go jobbie. It's bouquet's smoky and gloomy, like black Iberian ham on the one side, but it's also leaping madly with all sorts of prune, plum, crème de cassis and currants.

It's made after the *joven*, or young, style of the ready-to-drink Spanish Tempranillos. A few kays from this Little Road vineyard, up the slope on your actual piedmont, Susana Fernandez brought this style to the Vales, and has for many years made beautiful examples there at Cascabel.

This one's so bright and salacious and tantalising it seems to rivet my attention to the table. I want crumbly goat and sheep's cheese, warm kalamata and that black *ibérico* ham I could smell before I fell in.

Going back to Italy, even further up the mountains, we hit Lagrein in Tyrol, in the Alto Adige.

Keeping this **Serafino Bellissimo McLaren Vale Lagrein 2014** (\$20; 14% alcohol; screw cap) 'til last makes sense. It's by far the most complex, deeply alluring, even sultry of the three. It smells of everything the above wines have, times three, with deep woodfired kitchen stove smells. Pot black and soot; almost peat. It's fruit is somewhere between a sort of dense traditional Aussie fruit cake and a racy panforte, with all its musky confectioner's sugar.

By Jove it's a silky, snaky thing to drink. It's gorgeous. Some of those aromas made me expect something more cooked and crusty and like olden days but this is a real shiny damn viper. I can feel its dainty fangs going into my wrist. Its acid is steely and supple, its tannins like a velvet bandage.

Which is no guarantee the poison's not already gone right on in. Too late I reckon.

This vivacious fruit comes from a different vineyard - much further from the Gulf - at McLaren Flat. I suspect this contributes more to the fact that it's closer to a traditional McLaren Vale soul in its rich wholesomeness, but the trend stops there.

For a fourteen per center, this wine's as serpentine as the region gets. It'd be a stunner to pour at table, in counterpoint to Sabella's Colorino, which is nearly three times this little price but grows just along the track on the Flat.

I want biroldi con crauti: Tyrolean blood sausages with chestnuts and sauerkraut, lotsa fresh-ground pepper, mustard sauce and nutmeg over the top.

Crunchy-crust white bread and lotsa butter.

And do pass me another asp, would you Tony?



Consultant/writer Sophie Otton with the author and Serafino winemaker Charlie Whish after last year's International Grenache Day Masterclass at Serafino ... photo©Rusty Gallagher

I congratulate the Serafino crew for getting these adventurous, slurpy wines to us at \$20. Many would have charged much more. And I promise: all three are better if splooshed through a decanter. Give 'em some air.