

ADELAIDE

Old Plains and Longhop: Both \$30, both outstanding value

PLAINS

If there are crops at all it's mostly carrots and potatoes and onions now, but the real stab are the houses, the sub-divisions, the suburban sprawl over land that should be covered in vines. This is the land known as the Adelaide Plains, 30 kilometres north of Adelaide and just south-east of the Barossa Valley. It is land, in general wine terms, that is vastly under-appreciated, and certainly has been historically by various local and state government bodies and councils. Adelaide and its sprawling surrounds is a tragedy of prime vineyard land surrendered too-easily to housing. The upshot is that the Adelaide Plains is a place that should be wine famous: Max Schubert loved it, and used its fruit in Grange, and spoke passionately of just how great he thought those Adelaide Plains grapes were. Doug Lehmann loves it, Joe Grilli loves it, Colin Glaetzer loves it, and Charles Melton and Robert O'Callaghan and Scott Collett have all worked on it.

Domenic Torzi loves it too, and is doing something about it – he's making wine from some of the existing vineyards. When I say existing I mean just that – that vast bulk of these vineyards have been pulled out, and in some cases the grapes Domenic is buying and harvesting are grown on rows that are 100 metres long – the problem being that there are only two rows left.

"When I'm walking through these vineyards though," Domenic says, "things like Grange are the furthest thing from my mind. It's the depth and individuality of flavours ... it's almost a dictionary of flavours." There's a quest here. A quest for the place Domenic grew up to receive it's true recognition – he remembers even as a kid growers telling him how flavoursome the grapes were from these vines, and how they could make it into the very best wines the country had to offer. He talks of the Adelaide Plains as "the lost region", and how he has a driving hunger to help the region surge once again. He talks of "wondrous fields of red clay, sunshine and migrant culture.

"The vineyards needed me as much as I needed them. I also remember well the 1980s, when 1950s plantings of shiraz, cabernet sauvignon and grenache were all uprooted. What remained of the old vines was half an acre here and one acre there.

What remains are about four acres of vines when once there were forty. What remains are vines capable of routinely producing rich, flavour-soaked, black grapes that do most of the winemaking for you – which is why Domenic not only uses whole berries, open fermenters and basket pressing, but only 25 percent new oak – the fruit does the talking, the fruit has its own turn of phrase.

Old Plains

(email: oldplains@twpo.com.au)

Old Plains Power of One Adelaide Plains Shiraz 2004 (\$30) screwcap: Luscious and lovely, full of licorice and spice and earth, loaded with silken, fine, beautifully ripened tannins and coal-black to its heart. This is a beautiful, sweet-fruited, proportioned wine that I'd happily chew on all evening. It will age, but it will be best young. Drink: 2006-2009. 92 points.

Longhop Adelaide Plains Old Vine Reserve 2004 (\$30) screwcap: This is made off 50 year old cabernet and shiraz vines grown in the Adelaide Plains from a vintage that got a bit too hot but then produced the goods in spades. That heat seems to have robbed this wine of some of its fruit definition, but to deny its quality would be ridiculous: this is sweet and deep and black, with raisiny blackcurrant, licorice, menthol, earth and dried herbs sailing on a raft of delicious, superfine, substantial tannin. There's still a raspberried, chocolatey brightness here and a lift of violet-like mouth perfume certainly seduces. It drinks very well now, though you could keep it almost indefinitely. Drink: 2006-2014. 94 points.