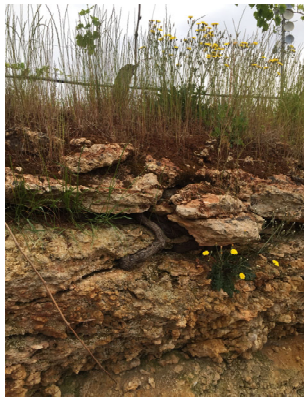


FROM THE CELLAR... BRAND'S LAIRA

YOU HAVE TO VISIT OUR WINERY BECAUSE...

“We make a range of wines that highlight the unique attributes of Coonawarra that are only available from the winery Cellar Door, and of course, our friendly and knowledgeable staff.” – Peter Weinberg, Chief Winemaker, Brand's Laira



Brand's Laira's soil and vineyard.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

November 13, 2018

Situated in the heart of the Coonawarra wine region in South Australia, Brand's Laira represents everything great about the famous area known for its Terra Rossa soil and outstanding red wines. But if you expect to taste only Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz in this part of the world, you might be (pleasantly) surprised...

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The history of Brand's Laira starts at sea, ironically, with Captain Henry Stentiford. He purchased a parcel of land in Coonawarra in 1895 and, to this day, that same terroir produces some of the region's outstanding offerings. The winery's name originates from the English Captain's favourite sea vessel, a clipper known as the Laira. That's why the winery's logo showcases the beautiful ship.

Brand's Laira came into existence in 1950, when the original owner, Eric Brand, a baker, and his wife, Nancy Redman, acquired the estate's first vineyard, a gift from the Redman family. Back then, Shiraz vines occupied 2 of the 24 original hectares.

The Redman family was (and still is) an important family in the history of Coonawarra. In fact, they continue to own and operate an award-winning estate down the street from Brand's Laira, literally.

Casella Family Brands, who also own Peter Lehmann Wines and Yellow Tail, purchased Brand's Laira in 2016. Since then, production has expanded, and it remains spread across three sites, Station Vineyard, Laira Vineyard, and Kirkgate Vineyard.

Interestingly, the old railway station platform situated in the Station Vineyard offers one of the highest (think waist-high) vantage points in the entire Coonawarra region.

In total, Brand's Laira crushes about 2,000 tonnes of grapes annually, the equivalent of approximately 50,000 cases of wine. To put that in context, the Coonawarra region crushes about 35,000 tonnes of grapes per year, approximately 7% of the total production in South Australia, which in turn represents just over half the total production in the entire country.

WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY

At Brand's Laira, the entire staff, from winemaker to sales team, aims to produce an outstanding range of wines while embracing seasonal changes, respecting the environment, and contributing to the well-being of the entire community. The approach involves balance, dedication, and integrity, three qualities the estate possesses in spades.



*Trent Brand, Vineyard Manager,
Brand's Laira*

ONE-ON-ONE WITH TRENT BRAND, VINEYARD MANAGER AT BRAND'S LAIRA

While giving us a tour of the estate in his trusty silver truck, Trent Brand, the original owner's grandson, spoke earnestly and enthusiastically about his experience growing up in the vineyard. We appreciated his down-to-earth, amicable approach, as well as his insights into what makes Brand's Laira special.

Q: Of all the wines Brand's Laira produces, which one is your favourite and why?

A: The 2010 Blockers Cabernet. So consistent!

[Trent clarified this is also his all-time favourite wine, which, in our book, speaks for itself.]

Q: What's the best part of your job?

A: The variability. Everyday, you can do something different. A lot of what we do in the vineyard depends on how quickly we can respond to the weather.

Q: What's the worst part of your job?

A: When you have to work in horrible conditions.

Q: Tell us one thing about you or your winery that nobody else knows.

A: Because of the remoteness, we [the wineries in the region] interact a lot. We talk to each other. If someone has trouble or needs to borrow a piece of equipment, or whatever, we help each other out. It's about community spirit.

"My job is to deliver the best possible grapes to our winemaker."

– Trent Brand

As a bonus, we had the opportunity to ask a few questions during our tasting with Peter Weinberg, Chief Winemaker. Here's what he had to say:



*Peter Weinberg, Chief Winemaker,
Brand's Laira*

Q: What do you like most about wine?

A: I like many things about wine, it is hard to say what I like best. Wine represents its origin and winemaking. Wine complements good food, making a meal special., Wine is great to drink with friends, helping to provide a robust discussion. And, wine just tastes so damn good!!

Q: What's the best part of your job?

A: The winemaking.

[Of note, Peter beamed while showing us his state-of-the-art, optic grape-sorting machine, a piece of equipment he can program to select grapes based on specific parameters, such as size and colour. Interestingly, a few other winemakers we met during our time in Australia expressed jealousy about Brand's Laira owning this cutting-edge technology.]

Q: What's the worst part of your job?

A: The paperwork.

Q: What is your most embarrassing wine moment?

A: In preparing to bottle a tank of wine, I turned on the cooling, unaware the return line had been switched off for maintenance. It over-pressurized and blew the top, and the wine got contaminated with coolant.

Q: What is your ultimate favourite wine and why?

A: Our 2010 One Seven One Cabernet because of its purity and quintessential Cabernet flavours.

THE TASTING...

In total, we tasted 12 wines with Peter Weinberg, who spoiled us with his in-depth knowledge and warm hospitality. We started with the 2018 Old Station Riesling (price: \$20 AUD) and ended with the 2014 Barrelman Cabernet Sauvignon (price: \$15 AUD).

In between, we tasted the:

- 2016 Laira Chardonnay (price: \$15 AUD)
- 2017 Blockers Chardonnay (price: \$28 AUD)
- Old Station Rosé (price: \$20 AUD; Merlot and Shiraz blend)
- 2013 Blockers Shiraz (price: \$28 AUD)
- 2013 August Tide (price: \$28 AUD; Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot blend)
- 2015 Blockers Cabernet (price: \$28 AUD; Cabernet Sauvignon)
- 2013 Tall Vines Shiraz (price: \$40 AUD)
- 2013 Blockers Shiraz (price: \$28 AUD)
- 2010 One Seven One Cabernet (price: \$80 AUD; Cabernet Sauvignon)
- 1998 Blockers Cabernet (limited release; Cabernet Sauvignon)

Although we enjoyed the 2010 One Seven One Cabernet, an intense, opulent offering that would likely benefit from at least another 10 years in the cellar, we had two clear winners.

First, the 2013 August Tide, a concentrated blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot, offered high acidity and delicious blueberry, dark chocolate, cassis, prune, and leather notes, as well as an enjoyable, enduring finish. In fact, we were well out of Coonawarra by the time the finish petered out (okay, maybe we're exaggerating a little here, but you get the point).

Second, the 1998 Blockers Cabernet, the star of the show, offered black plums, mint, eucalyptus, fennel, mocha, leather, charred oak, and cedar notes. The deep garnet colour gave an indication of its age, and we appreciated the round, albeit drying tannins. This medium-bodied wine illustrates how Cabernet Sauvignon from Coonawarra can evolve over time, and it demonstrates how reds from South Australia benefit from cellaring.

FINAL NOTES

Spending time at Brand's Laira, tasting some of their exceptional wines, and interacting with their welcoming, down-earth staff made our visit to the Coonawarra region well worth the effort. We were most impressed by the range of offerings, some of which we have already enjoyed with friends, as well as the innovative, environmentally-friendly, and community-conscious approach. As a bonus, you might find a gem or two, like the 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon, available exclusively at the Cellar Door.

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