



MARCHAND & BURCH
Great Southern & Margaret River

BRILLIANT BURGUNDY

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FEBRUARY 19, 2005
THE AGE



THE SECRET TO FRENCH WINE IS ALL IN THE TERROIR, SAYS A GIFTED WINEMAKER.

French winemaker Pascal Marchand must have a golden touch. How else to explain his extraordinary good luck in being offered the chance to head an outstanding vineyard at the age of 22? Or to be inspired and mentored by the greatest Burgundian winemakers such as Henri Mayer and, more recently, turn around a company producing supermarket wines into super wines?

Since 1999, 42-year-old Marchand, has been the winemaker at Domaine de la Vougeraie, owned by negociants Boisset. The domaine, 37 hectares of vines in Burgundy from the Cote de Beaune to Cote de Nuits, comprised four disparate estates but now, under Marchand, has been carefully reined in as one.

On reflection, Marchand admits, he's a lucky man. Then again, his winemaking philosophy is the key to his success.

"I am not an interventionist winemaker. I want the wines to stay really close to their terroir, to the originality of the place where the wine comes from and to do that, we work really hard in the vineyard," he says.



For Marchand, that includes organic and bio-dynamic farming methods - one reason why horses are used to plough the best sites so that the soil is not compacted and rendered less viable. All that meticulous work helps create a healthy vineyard, which, in turn, produces great fruit.

Marchand was actually born in Montreal and while there wasn't a wine culture so obvious as there is today, he and a few friends, all of 18 years old, started a wine club and organised tastings. They could get plenty of Bordeaux but not really interesting Burgundy. Besides, he hadn't seen a vineyard or cellar so he decided to head to France for the vintage in 1983.

He ended up doing harvest at Chateau de Chorey Les Beaune for Francoise Germain, "a fantastic experience". Through Germain, he met the Comte Armand, who changed the direction of the young Marchand's life.

"When I met the Comte Armand, I didn't really know who he was. He said 'I have this piece of land in Pommard and you're my man. I want you to look after it'. I said, wow. Fantastic. No problem. But when I went home that night, I thought, am I crazy? I was only 22. I knew nothing about wine. I had no experience."

He also had ambitions to be a writer, a poet. Yet, there was this extraordinary once-in-a-lifetime opportunity being offered. Although Marchand had already enrolled in an enological course, he became not only the winemaker but the manager of the estate. He stayed for 15 wonderful years, until taking on the Domaine de la Vougeraie project because, by then, he needed a new challenge.

During his tyro years, Marchand met some of the most respected winemakers, including Mayer, who were so generous in sharing their knowledge. "I was a nobody and they shared all their experiences and passion with me."

Marchand attended last week's Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir Celebration and was impressed by what he saw. "I found it very interesting to gauge the progress of the whole region. There's definitely something really going on there. I have a special interest in pinot noir anyway, and it's so fascinating to see the differences."

Part of the joy of winemaking for Marchand is discovering new wine regions and he travels twice a year to seek them out as "every region has passionate characters making wines that are amazing. I hate commercial wines. I hate industrial wines."

That is, wines that are so clean, sterile and perfect to the point of being boring, wines that are manipulated by winemakers. Marchand adds that he'd prefer to drink a faulty wine over the so-called clean stuff. "A bit of gas or cloudiness in the wine, you don't see those in industrialised wines but you don't see the magic either."

And yet, some in the French wine industry can appear quite intolerant to innovation, Marchand's not one of them. As a result of this trip to Australia, he'll experiment with the 2004 vintage and put some wine under screwcap. He's definitely a Burgundian winemaker to watch.

