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WINE STYLE

KING OF ITALIAN REDS

To love Sangiovese, you need to taste the real stuff, says Jane Faulkner.

One of the most exciting aspects to the Australian wine industry is our ability to experiment. We're not bound as such, by stringent, complicated (read often illogical) wine laws as evidenced in France and Italy. Of course, there are benefits to those countries' appellations but discussing the pros and cons would take up several volumes and probably highlight more inconsistencies.

Apart from an obvious diversity of flavor and style, which is good for drinkers, experimentation with grape varieties is important, because we discover which ones do, and don't do, well in certain regions and we learn the best viticultural practices suited to that variety: a time-consuming, expensive exercise. And yet, all that doesn't necessarily equate to quality.

Take Sangiovese.

Interest in this variety is burgeoning, highlighted in part to what's already available in bottle shops and witnessed at a workshop during last year's Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show held in Mildura: It seems Sangiovese has a great future in Australia: But we shouldn't be under any illusions that we are going to make Italian or Tuscan – style Sangiovese. And consumer unfamiliar with Sangiovese shouldn't think Australian examples taste the same as the Italian stuff just because it's an Italian variety: Embrace difference but appreciate both styles. Therein lies another problem. Selling great Italian Sangiovese here is not easy.

Firstly, consumers have to contend with unusual labeling, the seemingly higher price factor or the fact they just don't know enough about Sangiovese. And so too sommeliers and wine retailers. Sure they have a difficult enough job juggling the plethora of wines available here, but many don't get this variety or don't have the inclination or rather, any support from their bosses so that they can become more knowledgeable.



Yet, to appreciate Sangiovese, as with any variety, you must taste and taste, and do so with food: Let's face it, Italians don't drink wine unless they're eating.

The alternative is to get a bunch of food- wine enthusiasts to share the cost of the wine or go to structured tastings.

At one recently, hosted by Andrew Wood from Divine magazine, more than 20 sangioveses were tried varying in price from \$ 19 to the most expensive at \$350.

Everyone left that night including tyros and more experienced folk, with an impression of what this great variety is all about...

SPLURGE

La Spinetta Rosso di Toscana Sezzana 2001

This is 100 per cent Sangiovese and there's just a hint of vanilla and cherry on the nose, with lovely dusty notes so often associated with Sangiovese. It's an incredibly juice wine, well balanced and full-bodied, but not overt like a big Barossa shiraz. Drinking beautifully now but will age gracefully given the right conditions. Stunning wine.