

# 100% Aussie Wine... or near enough!

**M**ost consumers have never heard of “flying winemakers”. Contrary to what the name might suggest, this unique group of winemakers is not part of a circus trapeze troop but are winemakers who travel between the northern and southern hemisphere to make wine – effectively working year around to be part of harvest in both hemispheres.

Aussie winemakers who left Australia during the winter to travel to the Old World in search of Old World vineyard management and vinification knowledge were the “flying winemakers” pioneers. It didn't take long for Old World to catch on and travel Down Under to see how they were making wine. Whatever direction the winemakers fly the advantage of sharing winemaking knowledge and techniques has helped improve the quality of wine in both hemispheres.

Celine Rousseau, French winemaker at Chalker's Crossing in New South Wales, was a one such winemaker who decided to take the antipodean challenge. With a background in bio-chemistry and microbiology, she first put her studies to work in Champagne at Mumm, but found that the bubbles didn't hold the as much allure as still wines. However the experience helped her discover her passion for wine and led her to earn her diploma in Oenology. She then moved to the center of wine knowledge in France, Bordeaux, where she learned 'traditional' Bordeaux winemaking – the “Grand Cru method” as she calls it.

After several years making wine in Bordeaux Celine landed in Australia to work in the Margaret River region for a couple of vintages, then was asked to take on full-time winemaking responsibilities for Chalker's Crossing. The vineyards were already planted but none of the winemaking equipment or winemaking expertise was in place, so Celine was tasked with setting up everything from scratch. This was a dream come true in many ways because such an opportunity would likely not have been possible in France. The hard work and expertise quickly paid off because not two years after the first Chalker's Crossing vintage the wines won numerous Gold medals in Australian wine competitions and Celine was named the Qantas Young Winemaker of the year award in 2002. Imagine – a recent French immigrant winemaker winning a prestigious Aussie award!

Celine's French training is an important ingredient in her winemaking style today. In many ways her wines reflect the best of both worlds. The NSW vineyards are capable of giving ripe, concentrated fruit in most years which makes the task of creating quality wine a little easier, though not without skill.

But in difficult, hotter years Celine also has the experience that any Bordeaux winemaker worth their salt can bring to bear to overcome Mother Nature and craft a well-made wine in challenging vintages. This skill and experience along with basic stylistic preferences are what makes the Chalker's Crossing wines unique: Certainly not French but not entirely an Australian style of wine either.

The 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon (recommended by The Local Nose) shows the skill of the winemaker in a challenging vintage. This was a drought year in NSW that was particularly difficult for vineyards in the Hilltops because there was little water to irrigate. The result was a very low yield of grapes, which can be good for wine quality, but that can also give fruit with tougher tannins. Celine compensated with shorter maceration (skin contact during fermentation) and managed to produce a very fresh, balanced red that has proved worthy of ageing – somewhat of like a Bordeaux red.

“Of course I know how to make wine, but I still learn something every year,” says Celine. The challenges of making single vineyard wines at Hilltops are evident every year. “Single vineyard wines don't have much room for error,” Celine points out. “It is difficult to correct a fault if the grapes are not good so you have to be precise about picking.” Beyond making quality wines, Celine's goal year in and year out is making wines that reflect the place where they are produced. New South Wales has its unique climate and terroir that manages to show in the Chalkers Crossing wines in part because of Celine's more classic, restrained style of winemaking that Celine allows the wines to express their terroir.

From Singapore we all have the opportunity to be “flying wine-drinkers” and visit Chalker's Crossing or other vineyards in Australia. Oeno-tourism can present wonderfully relaxing holidays plus offer a pleasant “sip” of wine education. But for those unable to travel Down Under then seek out the Chalker's Crossing wines at The Local Nose.com or from the Singapore importer Rev Distribution at their retail shop on Bali Lane. Several have been recommended by the Noses and all are fantastic, value-for-money wines.

*If you would like to join the BA wine club please email Sarah at [smayo@thelocalnose.com](mailto:smayo@thelocalnose.com) and she will add you to her mailing list. She runs events every month with a different theme. These are fun sociable evenings with lots of chat, heaps of information, nibbles and of course some fabulous wines.*

## **Contributed by Sarah Mayo**

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