

**U3A Castlemaine Wine Appreciation Group**  
**2 May 2019**  
**Wines and food presented by Mikael H and Helle H**

**Canberra Wine District**

Canberra Wine District is actually mostly in southern NSW and with just a few wineries in the ACT itself. It is known for Riesling and cool-climate Shiraz. Generally, they offer quite expensive wines and often cellar doors are expanded into fine dining restaurants, reflecting the socioeconomic status of the Canberra wine drinker market and frequent flow of international visitors to Canberra.

The Helm label of today's wine states the following wine trivia taken from Canberra's centenary 1913 – 2013 celebration: "The first grapes in Canberra: in 1853 Hamilton Hume, the explorer made wine at his Comur Cottage near Yass. Robert Campbell at Duntroon House (now the Royal Military College) had vineyards in 1860. Clemente Froner an Italian migrant, grew grapes in the Canberra suburb of Narrabundah, in 1929. The Canberra Wine District started in the early 1970s, when a group of mainly academics from CSIRO planted vines in NSW surrounding the ACT."

It may be worth adding that the early pioneering wine making efforts around Canberra literally turned sour as it was felt that a good sheep pasture was a better use of the land. Since then science has shaped the wine industry in Canberra.

The CSIRO Wine Club started 1971 by Drs John Kirk (biochemist), Ken Helm and Edgar Riek (both entomologists). Their first planting at Mount Majura in Canberra took place in 1972. Ken Helm was the only one with relevant experience; his German family pioneered planting vines in the Rutherglen area. The three scientists and winemaker pioneers also established the Canberra Vignerons Association in 1974. Edgar Riek also established the Canberra Wine and Food Society in 1953.

While the early pioneers of the 1970s struggled to successfully establish grapes in the Canberra District due to a combination of droughts, pests and spring frosts, current growers have access to improved technology that is making a considerable difference. The use of drip irrigation to assist vine establishment during the dry, hot summers that occur in the District has proven to be essential, and some early frost-prone sites have now been abandoned or the vines grafted to later-budding varieties.

Careful site selection now allows growers to select those sites that have good cold-air drainage to minimise frost problems, and modern spray technology provides effective control of weeds, pests and potential mildew and Botrytis problems. This modern experience contrasts with the somewhat pessimistic views expressed by Dr John Gladstones in his seminal study of the environment and grape growing undertaken in 1992. At that time, he saw little potential in the Canberra District because of the hot summers and frost susceptibility of the region (Gladstones 1992).

Now there are more than 110 vineyards; over 30 cellar doors, many with excellent restaurant and function centres (especially weddings amongst the vines); and with a total of 450 ha of grapes grown, rapidly adjusting grape selection and wine making to warmer climate in the decades ahead.

**Wine 1: Helm, 2018 Classic Dry Riesling****11 %****\$ 38.00**

*Winemaker and Vineyard* <https://helmwines.com.au/>

The winery was established by Ken and Judith Helm in 1973. Their daughter Stephanie Helm now runs "The Vintner's Daughter" winery in Yass. In 2000 Ken established the Canberra International Riesling Challenge, the biggest single-wine event in the world, and was Chairman until 2016.

Helm Wines is known for producing award-winning Rieslings and Cabernet Sauvignons. The winery, which has been given a 5-star rating by James Halliday, is a must-visit for all budding and experienced wine connoisseurs. Located approximately 30km north of Canberra, the rural setting is the perfect backdrop for tasting quality wines and learning about the art of wine making.

*Tasting notes:*

Powerful citrus blossom aroma. Clean and fresh, crunchy green apples, minerality and lime cordial flavours balanced by intense citrus-like acidity. Lingering refreshing finish. (Ken Helm)

Rippling with rich flavour and piercing acidity; it really lands on point, with fresh pear, apple and lime fruits, lifting floral. Finishes clean and precise. Masterful. (Dan Murphy).

Halliday rating: 95 pt. (2016) 94 pt. (2017). Drink now to 2031.

**Wine 2: Brindabella Hills, 2016 Riesling****12 %****\$ 24.00**

*Winemaker and Vineyard* <https://www.brindabellahills.com.au/>

The Brindabella Hills vineyard was established in 1986 by Faye and Dr Roger Harris (CSIRO scientist) in an area just outside ACT not previously planted to vines. The winery was sold in 2017 and this wine was Roger Harris' last vintage.

The wines was initially planted as an experimental plot to assess the quality of premium varieties in this new area. Eight acres of premium grape varieties were planted on a granite ridge above the Murrumbidgee River. The vineyard site was selected based on climatic similarities to other premium wine growing areas of Australia and Europe – the Adelaide hills in South Australia, the Rioja in Spain and the hills of Tuscany south of Florence. All these areas have brilliant sunshine in abundance, and cool nights in the ripening season, which contributes to the development of intense berry flavours in the resulting wines.

Over the past few years, this has led to many award winning wines and national "boutique winery" trophies for Chardonnay and Shiraz as well as local trophies for Riesling, Cabernets, and Sauvignon Blanc-Semillon. James Halliday has given the winery a 4½ star rating (2013 Wine Companion).

*Tasting notes:*

A Riesling in the classic Australian Style. A crisp and refreshing wine with a bouquet reminiscent of fresh limes. An ideal accompaniment to fish and shellfish dishes and piquant appetisers (Roger Harris).

The bouquet is elegant and floral with hints of citrus and rose blossom. The palate combines citrus and apple with along crisp finish. (Jim Murphy).

The wine was awarded a silver medal at the Canberra International Riesling Challenge and Halliday has given a 95 point rating and drinkable to 2029.

**Wine 3: Lark Hill, 2018 Viognier****12 %****\$ 30.00**

Winemaker and Vineyard <https://larkhill.wine/>

The winemakers are Sue and Dr John Carpenter (ex CSIRO statistician and ANU Mathematics, respectively). The Lark Hill vineyard was established in 1978 and is now run as a biodynamically managed vineyard. The vineyard is situated at an altitude of 860m, one of the highest plantings in the wine district and offering splendid views of the Lake George escarpment. The Carpenters have made wines of real quality, style and elegance from the start, but have defied all the odds (and conventional thinking) with the quality of their Pinot Noirs in favourable vintages. Significant changes have come in the wake of son Christopher gaining three degrees, including a double in wine science and viticulture.

Lark Hill produces Riesling, Grüner Veltliner, Chardonnay & Pinot Noir, and the Rhône varieties Marsanne, Roussanne and Viognier, plus Sangiovese and Shiraz. Lark Hill is mostly known for their top Pinot Noir wine (retails at \$45) and pioneering of the Austrian Grüner Veltliner grape variety (their wine obtained 5<sup>th</sup> place in the Austrian world Grüner Veltliner competition; \$45 in retail),

Tasting notes: With its floral aromas and hints of apricot and ginger the Viognier, from the Rhône Valley in France, is a delicious food friendly alternative to some more established varieties. This wine has fresh nectarine and cumquat flavours and a component was wild yeast fermented in French oak to add creaminess and complexity to the vibrant palate. There are hints of toasted hazelnut and brioche, and the finish is long and textured (winemakers)

Halliday has given the winery 4 ½ star rating

**Wine 4: Lerida Estate, 2017 Lake George Pinot Noir****13.5 %****\$26.50**

Winemaker and Vineyard <https://www.leridaestate.com.au/>

Anne Caine and Jim Lumbers planted the first vines at the winery in 1997 and over the past decade have earned more than 500 medals, in particular for pinot noir and shiraz viognier wines. The winery was sold a few years ago.

The selection of Lerida as a vineyard site was influenced by the work of Dr Edgar Riek at next-door Lake George Wines. With Edgar's experience in mind, they aspire to produce world class Pinot Noir, made from low-yielding vines with elegant, secondary flavours using wild yeast and minimal intervention. The best of Australian Pinot Noir fruit with French-style elegance, complexity and structure. The vineyard is one of the highest in Australia and is planted with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Merlot, Shiraz and Viognier grapes. Lerida is most famous for its Pinot Noir, Shiraz Viognier and Botrytis Pinot Gris wines.

Tasting notes

Care in both vineyard and winery have produced a wine with fine, distinctive fruit flavours of cherry and red currants, and seamless integration between fruits and tannins from oak maturation. Subtle at first, the savoury overtones of autumn leaves, allspice and cigar box will intensify with bottle maturation.

Halliday has given the winery a 5-star rating and 82 points to this wine, drinkable to 2027.

**Wine 5: Quarry Hill, 2016 Lost Acre Tempranillo****13 %****\$23.00**

*Winemaker and Vineyard* <https://quarryhill.com.au/>

Quarry Hill is a small family-owned vineyard situated just outside with elevations ranging from 630m up to 655m. It was established in 1999 by Professor Deane Terrell towards the end of his tenure as vice-chancellor of the Australian National University (1994-2001) and professor in economics to keep him active in retirement. It was named after a section of the property that provided stone for the construction of the Barton Highway.

Much of the vineyard's four and a half hectares are devoted to Shiraz, with smaller blocks of Tempranillo, Sangiovese, Sauvignon Blanc, Savagnin, Grenache, Mataro/Mourvedre and Roussanne. The viticulture has emphasised delivery of low yields of high quality fruit, making for a range of distinctive wines that reflect the unique soils (and rock) of the vineyard. Halliday has given the winery a 4-star rating.

*Tasting notes*

This is a bright, vibrant Tempranillo, enhanced with the addition of a little Grenache. Aromas of dark cherries and red fruit carry through to the palate and are balanced with good acid and fine tannins.

**Wine 6: Mt Majura Vineyard, 2017 Lime Kiln Red****13 %****\$25.00**

*Winemaker and Vineyard* <https://www.mountmajura.com.au/>

The winemaker is Frank van de Loo (former plant geneticist, CSIRO) and Winemaker of the year finalist 2018. The site was originally chosen by Edgar Riek and planted by Mrs Dinny Killen in 1988.

The Mount Majura Vineyard is now a dynamic boutique winery and vineyard and a leader in the Canberra District for Spanish varieties such as Tempranillo. Their single vineyard site of red clay loam soils containing limestone also produces quality Riesling, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Graciano, a Cabernet Blend and Shiraz.

*Tasting notes:*

This new wine in our range is a great introduction to the vineyard, led by spicy shiraz fruit, complexed by some jubey mondeuse, and rounded out by the velvety texture of touriga.

Lime Kiln Red is a new medium-bodied blend that's all about deliciousness and drinkability. With such a collection of interesting varieties in the vineyard and winery, new blending trials are irresistible fun. The inaugural 2017 Lime Kiln Red is 50% shiraz, 25% mondeuse, 20% touriga and 5% tempranillo. And the name? A 1912 map of the district showed a 'Lime Kiln Block' near the current vineyard site, presumably burning limestone similar to that in the vineyard to make builder's lime.

The wine won Gold medal in the 2018 Canberra and Region Wineshow and Halliday describes the winery as a 5-star performer in the Canberra District and has awarded this wine 91 points and drinkable to 2022.

**Wine 7: Nick O’Leary, 2017 Shiraz****13.5 %****\$30.00**

Winemaker and Vineyard <https://nickolearywines.com.au/>

At 28 years of age, Nick O'Leary founded Nick O'Leary wines focussing on making wines with grapes sourced from a variety of growers. “Since our beginnings, well over a decade ago, our focus has always been to make hand worked Shiraz and Riesling wines that truly exhibit the character of our region as well as expressing our unique personality and style.”

Situated in the picturesque Hall Valley, in the Murrumbidgee River corridor, just outside the ACT, the estate incorporates a modern winemaking facility and a mature 5-hectare vineyard. The wines have received high profile recognition at a national and international level including the prestigious Stodart Trophy in 2014 and the NSW Wine of the Year in both 2014 and 2015 – the latter being the first and only time in the awards 20-year history that the accolade has been received multiple times by a single producer, let alone in consecutive years.

James Halliday has rated Nick O’leary wines as one of the 10 top value wineries in the region.

Tasting notes

An elegant fragrance of red-fruits, dusted spice and lifted white pepper. The palate brims with dark berry fruits and delivers a silky textured mouth feel which finishes with long fine tannins.

This wine is a Canberra regional blend, consisting of seven different vineyard parcels. Halliday has awarded the wine 95 points.

**Wine 8: Clonakilla, 2017 Hilltop Shiraz****14 %****\$28.00**

Winemaker and Vineyard <https://clonakilla.com.au/>

Winemakers are Tim Kirk (son of Dr John Kirk, one of the founders of the Canberra Wine District) and Bryan Martin (gourmet food and wine writer as well as owner the Ravensworth Winery in the Canberra Wine District).

Established by the Kirk family at Murrumbateman in 1971 and now celebrated as one of the best wineries in Australia, Clonakilla is a small, family business dedicated to producing distinctive, handcrafted Canberra region wines in limited quantities. Their wines have earned critical acclaim, with Tim Kirk named Gourmet Traveller Wines' Winemaker of the Year in 2013. Halliday consistently rates their Shiraz Viognier very high with 98 pts. in 2013, 2016 and 2017 (retails now at \$120).

Tasting notes:

The 2017 vintage was punctuated by good rain at the right times with just the right amount of light and heat in between. Great colour again this year with a surge of rich black fruit through the aroma. There is plenty of ripe tannin driving the palate (Tim Kirk)

James Halliday gives this wine 93 pts and drinkable to 2030