

Touriga finds home in the Hunter

RICK ALLEN
 WINE



CHANCES are you haven't heard of Touriga Nacional. But that's about to change because there's a small but growing band of adventurous Hunter Valley winemakers who are doing something about that.

And the early signs are incredibly positive.

Touriga is a popular red wine variety in Portugal - in fact, many consider it to be that country's finest table wine.

With similar climatic conditions between southern Portugal and the Hunter, it was only a matter of time before it was tested here in Australia.

The boutique Whispering Brook winery at Broke was the first to try (although it is believed Brian McGuigan tried it for a short time at his Wyndham Estate vineyards many years ago), grafting across a shiraz vineyard to touriga in 2008, with their first vintage in 2011.

Mike De Iuliis was quickly



Whispering Brook owners and winemakers Susan Frazier and Adam Bell, who have made Touriga Nacional their winery's flagship red variety.

in on the action, first with a shiraz touriga blend that has won multiple trophies over the years, and then a straight touriga, while Mount Pleasant is doing an interesting tempranillo touriga blend.

More will surely follow, if they haven't already.

Susan Frazier, co-owner

and winemaker at Whispering Brook and a regular visitor to Portugal, has been a huge fan since day one.

"Touriga is interesting, it is very aromatic and brings a lifted violet and blackberry character to the nose, and there's a real juiciness in the fruit," she said.

"It doesn't like as much time in oak as other red varieties and while it's a thick-skinned grape, it's an anomaly because it doesn't have the crunchy tannins you would expect.

"It means it's approachable from a really young age." I had the opportunity re-

cently to taste their original 2011 touriga and was wowed by it - it was superb.

De Iuliis and Adrian Sparks, chief winemaker at Mount Pleasant, echo Frazier's enthusiasm for the floral lift that touriga can bring to their blends.

"It's just so fragrant and

spicy that it can really lift a wine," he said.

"It's a powerful, but wonderful variety."

For De Iuliis, his shiraz touriga has established itself as one of his flagship wines.

"Touriga handles the heat well, which is good, but it can be hard to get ripe in the wetter vintages," De Iuliis said.

"So I don't tend to make it in those years.

"But in the warm vintages, I think there's only been one vintage where I haven't won a trophy somewhere with it. But I admit I'm still learning about it.

"I have a five-acre vineyard on Lovedale Road with shiraz and some touriga planted.

"The shiraz was always a nice wine - medium bodied, florals and blueberries - but when I added the touriga it lifted it and pushed it to a whole new level.

"If it's a good crop and I have excess fruit, I'll make a straight touriga.

"But the blend is way above it in the pecking order."

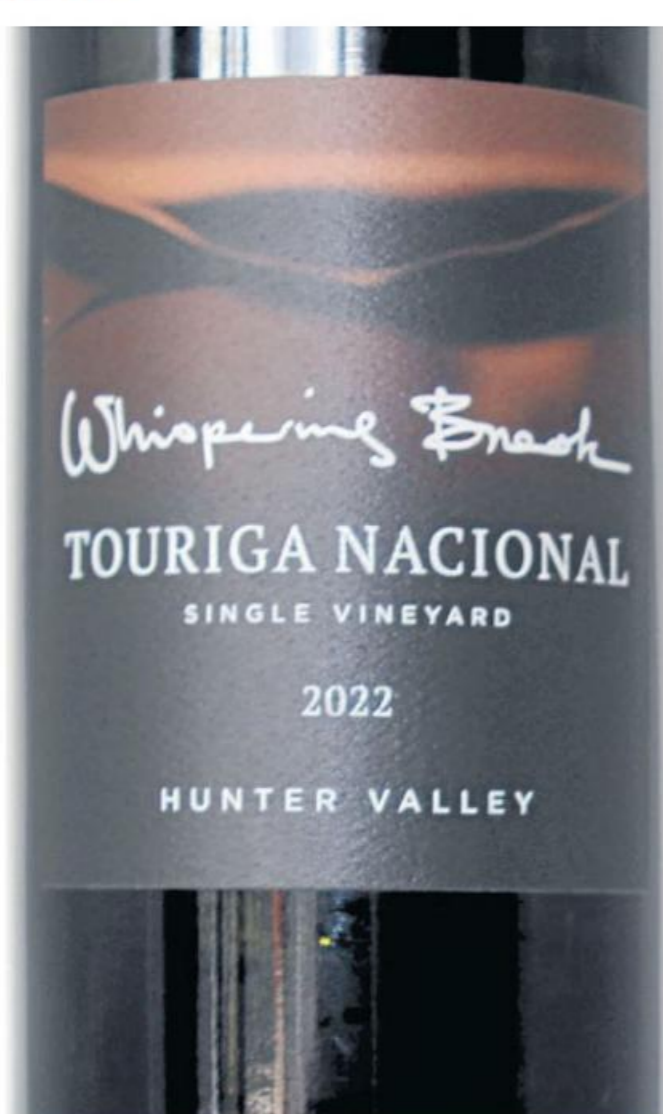
Terrific touriga ... don't hesitate.

REVIEWS by Rick Allen

YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL

Whispering Brook Touriga Nacional, 2022
PRICE: \$70

This is 100 per cent touriga, made from handpicked grapes on Whispering Brook's red soils. Immediately the lifted florals on the nose are obvious - all very enticing. On the tongue this is lush with lashings of dark fruit and tangy spice, wrapped up in a medium-bodied framework. Still very young, this will only get better with a few years in the bottle.



PERFECT PICK WITH PASTA

Mount Pleasant Tempranillo Touriga, 2021
PRICE: \$32

Winemaker Adrian Sparks only used 10 per cent touriga in this blend, but it's enough to give it a spicy, floral lift. The first thing you notice is its fleshy softness - it's an easy drinker, with a swirl of generous red fruits and a distinct savoury note to the finish. The tannins and acid are in harmony. This would go great with pizza or pasta.



VIBRANT FUTURE

De Iuliis LDR Vineyard Shiraz Touriga, 2020
PRICE: \$50

A 75-25 blend, this is medium-bodied and opens with blueberry flavours from the shiraz, vibrant and fresh, before the darker touriga element comes in to play on the back half, bringing length and drive. There's a chalky character to the tannins. This wine is drinking well, but has years ahead of it and I would think the best is still very much to come.



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