

YOU MUST VISIT SOUTH AUSTRALIA.....

JIM BARRY WINES. THE CLARE VALLEY

To get to the Clare Valley one drives North of Adelaide past the dreary suburban sprawl. The urban environment gradually disappears and it is grazing plains. The further you go, the browner it all becomes. You wonder how the few bedraggled sheep survive as there doesn't seem to be anything to eat. It is wonderful scenery with water wheels on the horizon, the odd gum tree, and every shade of ochre imaginable. There is the occasional small country town. At this stage any thought of vineyards is totally implausible, but after about sixty kilometres suddenly green vegetation appears. The Clare Valley starts here. This is how the original Irish settlers found the valley – they travelled with their families in wild-west wagons, and their livestock across from Sydney. It took a couple of years on the move, and they didn't stop until they found tall trees and luscious vegetation - which meant a ready source of water, from four main river systems, in such a parched continent. The valley was named by the settlers for its beauty and resemblance to the lovely green County Clare back home. From there it is a short, scenic drive past the vineyards into the sleepy town of Clare. There are plenty of shops servicing the agriculturalists, and not much else other than a set of traffic lights just by the police station, and I have often pondered their relevance when there are so few cars. After 8pm, even in the middle of the tourist season, they are about the only lights shining in the town.

Make for *The Clare Country Club*, park the car for the night and enjoy a swim and a beer around the pool. Make sure you are firmly ensconced at a table overlooking the lake before sunset- the view is superb. This is the time to get serious about the wine part of the trip, so play with the club's excellent list. The Clare Valley is Riesling and Red Wine territory and the former is a perfect aperitif. - light and flowery, often with hints of citrus and passionfruit and a crisp, dry finish – unlike any other Riesling in the world. It will perfectly accompany a delicate first course. Then, with the superb meat, choose one of Australia's finest Australian Cabernets or Shiraz.

It's time for serious tasting the next day. Golfers will no doubt want to play a round at the club in the morning, but I always make for *Jim Barry Wines*. The boss, Peter Barry, son of the late, great Jim, is a mate and it is always great to taste the latest releases, and admire the latest wine weaponry installed since the last visit. Peter is one of the world's great wine communicators and salesman – it his passion. The cellar door sales staff are terrific, in particular winemaker son Tom – the only third generation qualified winemaker in Australia, and his partner Olivia....but if Peter is around, you are in for a great privilege. He is not only one of the world's great wine salesmen, but also an absolute fount of information about the history of the valley

This month I tasted the new vintage of THE LODGE HILL RIESLING 2010 which had just won a Gold Medal at the Adelaide show. A marvellous example of what the valley does best. The reason for such delicacy is the cool climate. These Riesling vineyards are at 480metres altitude and benefit from the cooling winds from the Gulf only 60 kilometres west. A genuine cool climate in such a hot and dry state; (Peter assures me that he lights the open fire in his living room most summer evenings, but it always seems brilliantly warm when I visit!) . And of course no tasting would be complete without the two 'Cricketing Reds'. THE COVER DRIVE 2008 is well

known to regulars as it is one of our biggest selling premium wines. Wonderful, luscious silky Cabernet Sauvignon from the Clare and Coonawarra. THE FIRST ELEVEN is 100% Coonawarra fruit from Peter's vineyard on the old cricket ground in Penola. It is only made in the finest vintages, and the splendid 2006 follows the 2004. A marvellous wine with layer upon layer of subtle nuances.

Jealous of my travels? Next month I will tell you about my time with Grant & Helen Burge in the Barossa...