

THE AUSTRALIAN

Wines with an earthy quality

MAX ALLEN THE AUSTRALIAN FEBRUARY 09, 2013 12:00AM

IF I were to make a list of winemakers who excite me most right now - the ones pushing the boundaries of what's accepted, striving to produce wines of beauty and character - it would look a lot like the list of winemakers travelling to Sydney next Sunday for Rootstock, the Sustainable & Artisan Wine & Food Festival.

What unites these winemakers is a shared ethos of caring for their land and doing as little as necessary in the cellar to ensure the flavour of the vineyard is best expressed in the glass.

The Cooper family of Cobaw Ridge in Victoria's Macedon Ranges will be there, showing wines that have taken on a new edge in the past couple of years since converting to organic viticulture. James Erskine will be there, too: his Wood Vineyard Grenache from McLaren Vale deftly upsets old preconceptions of this oft-undervalued grape, showing it can have as much profound complexity as the best pinot noir.

Among many other locals who share a similar philosophy you'll meet Gilles Lapalus and his intense, mineral-rich wines from Sutton Grange vineyard in the granite country south of Bendigo; NSW winemaking elder David Lowe and his superb organic and preservative-free wines from Mudgee; a double-act of brilliant Beechworth winemakers - the laconic Barry Morey of Sorrenberg and the ebullient Julian Castagna; Ben Gould from exciting new winery Blind Corner in Margaret River - the list goes on.

A handful of top vigneron are also coming from across the Tasman: you'll be able to taste the rich, textural whites from Millton, the brave, bold wines of Pyramid Valley, the ethereal pinots from Rippon.

And the Italians will be out in forza. Winemakers from some of the country's best estates are flying in to Sydney for Rootstock, including the guys from Cantina Giardino, producers of amazingly textural whites and deeply savoury reds in Campania in the country's deep south, and Stanko Radikon, whose sulphur-free, extended skin-contact whites are an inspiration for many adventurous grape-treaders around the world.

It's going to be an absolute smorgasbord of good wines from sustainably farmed vineyards: wines of unforgettable character made by some unforgettable characters.

Rootstock hits The Italian Forum in Leichardt tomorrow week (February 17). The cost of entry is very reasonable, considering the number and quality of wines on tasting (\$35 pre-purchased through the website; \$40 at the door), and the day will finish with an unmissable \$200-a-head long-table dinner cooked by an impressive line-up of chefs including Aaron Turner (Loam, Victoria), Ben Greeno (Momofuku, Sydney) and Luke Burgess (Garagistes, Hobart).

For the record, I have no direct involvement in Rootstock, financial or otherwise, apart from volunteering my time to host a masterclass on the day and lobbying avuncular advice from the sidelines during the planning of the event. I just think it's a great initiative and want it to see it succeed, not least because it will expose more people to a greater diversity of wines.

For bookings and more: rootstocksydney.com.

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