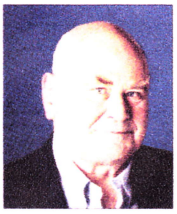
WINE JAMES HALLIDAY



In the 2006 edition of Jancis Robinson's *Oxford Companion to Wine* (aka the world's wine bible) the author says that lagrein is a "red grape variety grown on only about 300ha in Alto Adige" in the far north of Italy, but makes no mention of plantings elsewhere.

Cuttings came into Australia long ago and were planted in the CSIRO nursery at Merbein under the care of Allan Antcliff. In 1988 viticultural academic Peter May purchased cuttings from the nursery, and planted them in the backyard of his home in Kyneton because of the similarity of its climate to the Alto Adige, and made experimental batches.

The next step was taken by Alan and Nelly Cooper of Cobaw Ridge, who – with the aid of Peter May – top grafted 300 cabernet sauvignon with lagrein in 1994, and followed up with further plantings in '97 (now grown biodynamically). Their first commercial vintage in 1998 was the first in Australia, and possibly outside Italy.

The Coopers, now joined by wine science son Josh, have become friendly with a number of producers in the Alto Adige. The family recently staged an utterly fascinating tasting of 11 Italian lagreins (seven donated, and four imported) interwoven with five vintages of Cobaw Ridge.

First and foremost, there was a striking consistency of varietal character across all 18 wines, and a similar consistency of quality. Next, these deeply coloured, black cherry flavoured wines age well. The '98 Cobaw Ridge is travelling easily, with fragrant cherry aromas and flavours, and good length. The vintages of the remaining 15 wines fell between '05 and '09, making the inter-country comparison very interesting, with Cobaw Ridge holding its head high.

Databases are especially valuable for septuagenarians, and I was very surprised to find 20 Australian wineries with lagrein, one blending it with dolcetto. With typical Australian enthusiasm, it has been planted in a variety of climates, not all *prima facie* suited to the variety, but what is new?

2010 Heartland Langhorne Creek Dolcetto & Lagrein
An innovative blend of equal proportions of the two varieties. The wine has a bright crimson colour. Both the bouquet and medium- to full-bodied palate have things to say, the bouquet with dark cherry, almost into liqueur, the palate providing a slightly bitter/savoury cross cut. French oak also provides some hints of cedar. Interesting wine style asking for a red meat mate. 14% alc; screwcap
90 points; drink to 2016; $19.99

2009 Tiefenbrunner Castel Turmhof Lagrein
Tiefenbrunner is regarded as one of the best producers in the Alto Adige, so the quality of this wine was no surprise. Bright, clear crimson-purple, the bouquet has a highly fragrant black cherry core, the palate with terrific texture, mouthfeel and length, the tannins fine and ripe. Imported by Negociants Australia (www.negociantsaustralia.com). 13.5% alc; cork
95 points; drink to 2019; $35

2008 Cobaw Ridge Lagrein
I gave this wine 93 points when I tasted it in February, but this year for the *2012 Wine Companion* 10 months before its release, I am no longer happy with the points or the tasting note, for the wine has developed very well indeed. It is on a par with the lovely '05 Cobaw Ridge, with its deep black and red cherry fruit, and a pleasing touch of cherry pip bitterness on the finish. For release December. 13% alc; Diam
94 points; drink to 2020; $60