

Score one for Team Australia

We were holding off on our feature of Shaw + Smith, but when The New York Times published a piece this week on the Australian wine industry, stating that "neither wine media nor importers nor the top U.S. sommeliers – felt the need to learn much about Australia besides South Australian Shiraz," we decided to bump up our little piece. While there is certainly truth in the generalities being made in the Grey Lady and other publications about some of the important reasons for the Australian wine industry's sales declines in the US, the Shaw + Smith wines have stood out for two decades as an extreme exception in all the regards mentioned above. We feel a little miffed, as surely a number of others do. Moreover, as Australia searches to define itself in the eyes of the US and other important export markets, this cool climate producer in the Adelaide hills has been receiving even more attention than usual.

Over the last decade their wines have been named (remarkably):

- Australia's finest Sauvignon Blanc (Wine Spectator, Wine & Spirits, Jamie Goode, Sydney Morning Herald, many others).
- Australia's finest Chardonnay (James Halliday, Sydney Morning Herald, Wine Spectator not quite but named it one of Australia's 25 benchmark wines and has featured it in their top 100).
- Australia's finest Shiraz (James Halliday, and last month at the Decanter World Wine Awards top Australian Rhone varietal over \$20).
- And, finally, Australia's best red wine, full-stop (in 2005 the Penguin Guide, one of the most influential Australian wine publications, named the 2003 Shaw + Smith Shiraz its top Shiraz and top red wine of the year).

And now a flurry of focus on Shaw + Smith in the last year:

- Michael Hill-Smith (the "Smith" in Shaw + Smith) helps lead the Landmark Tutorial press and trade visits to Australia, highlighting Australia's regionality.
- Michael Hill-Smith nips Nicolas Catena by one spot and Gary Vaynerchuk by two spots on Decanter's annual power list, coming in at #38.
- Michael Hill Smith awarded Order of Australia for his contribution to the Australian Wine Industry (Michael founded Shaw + Smith with cousin Martin Shaw in 1989, and Michael was also the first Australian MW).

We're focusing on the Shaw + Smith M3 Chardonnay because, well, we opened a Chardonnay most recently. Namely, I pulled a bottle before heading to a dinner with a particular group of Francophile wine geek friends (les grenouille assoiffées, they call themselves) for whom I'll usually bring something I know that crowd gravitates to, a white from Domaine Marcel Deiss or Lucien Le Moine for example. I served the wine blind and the Puligny-Montrachet crus came flying. The fruit profile and structure make this a fair guess, and Michael Hill-Smith has in fact been known to serve a Premier Cru Puligny with several years of age next to an older Shaw + Smith Chardonnay. The M3 sees a Burgundian vinification: it is hand-picked, whole fruit-pressed, fermented in barrel, spends some time on its lees, and partially undergoes malolactic fermentation. To me, however (as long as I'm not tasting it blind), it's resolutely Adelaide Hills – a distinct mineral note, a fascinating tension between stone fruits laced with citrus, apple, pear and a hint of riper fruits, some melon and tropical

fruit. And, notably, the wine has a depth that unfolds but always stays precise and pure. In defense of my friends, it's not too often, if ever, they've been exposed to such a layered, tight and beautiful Australian Chardonnay.