

Help wanted.....

Is the World's Oldest Cabernet Sauvignon Vineyard on our doorstep?

“118 YEAR OLD LANGHORNE CREEK CABERNET SAUVIGNON VINEYARD SEEKING “LOST” RELATIVES. UNCONFIRMED SIGHTINGS OF SIMILARLY AGED SIBLINGS IN CHILE (BUT MAY ACTUALLY BE ADOPTED); BAROSSA CLAIMS INCONCLUSIVE – “WE THINK IT’S OLDER BUT DON’T HAVE THE RECORDS”. ENQUIRIES WELCOMED, PREFERABLY WITH I.D.”



With the majority of focus regarding Old Vines on Shiraz and Grenache here in Australia it appears that there has been an historical oversight over what many regard as the most regal of all red grapes – Cabernet Sauvignon.

There are historical references to Cabernet Sauvignon being planted in Australia as far back as the 1850’s and 1860’s in South Australia and Victoria, but its descendants in France date back several hundred years earlier.

The question is where are the oldest producing Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards and how old are they?

The historic “Metala” vineyards owned by Guy Adams and his family for five generations date back to 1891 when two acres each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz were planted on the alluvial soils bordering on the Bremer River. The wines of Brothers in Arms showcase the capabilities of these vineyards and the estate, which has since grown to almost 300 hectares.

But it is these original vines that generate much interest – today they continue to thrive, yielding 2.0 to 2.5 tonnes per acre – particularly the Cabernet Sauvignon, as “old vine” Cabernet Sauvignon is a rare beast.

As far as Brothers in Arms can ascertain their 1891 Cabernet block is the oldest officially recorded Cabernet Sauvignon in Australia, but where does that place it in a global context?

Bordeaux was wiped out by phylloxera in the 1880’s and 1890’s, as was California and most of Victoria. The highly reputable Coonawarra and Margaret River regions have no century-old Cabernet Sauvignon (Margaret River’s first plantings were in the late 1960’s whilst the oldest producing Coonawarra Cabernet dates back to the mid 1900’s).

In other regions, the Barossa claims the “Kalimna block” Cabernet dates back to the late 1880’s, but there are no official records to assist verify this. Overseas the only country that may match the “Metala” vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon appears to be Chile, but again records are proving difficult to verify. This is not helped by the fact that some of the oldest Cabernet in Chile appears to have been grafted on to old rootstocks of other varieties, so what applies – the age of the rootstocks (which aren’t Cabernet) or the date of the grafting – we think the latter. For the record, the Langhorne Creek 1891 Cabernet Sauvignon vines at “Metala” are on their own rootstocks.

So what is the verdict? Irrespective of the age, the Brothers in Arms Cabernet Sauvignon (\$50 rrp) contains all of the grapes grown on the 1891 block, making it one of the most affordable century-plus old vine wines available.