

WINERY OF THE YEAR 2016: TAHBILK WINES

Tahbilk

Nagambie Lakes

Star Rating: 5

When brooding about the selection of Winery of the Year, I recalled that in 1994 the Maurice O’Shea Award had been given to Jacob’s Creek, and in 2002 to the Australian Wine Research Institute, both examples of lateral thinking that (in very different ways) made my choice of Tahbilk seem conventional. But prior awards for the *Companion’s* Winery of the Year had been selected by currently available wines as the main criteria.



The liquid history of Tahbilk’s wine portfolio is unique. Its 1860 Vines Shiraz is made from vines that were all planted in 1860, with no replacement vines to fill gaps created by vines dying through disease – or frost, as in 2007, when 40% of the vines were killed. The result is that in a good year, production will only be 150 dozen. After 18 months’ maturation in French oak, the wine is bottled and held in the Tahbilk cellars for four years before release. It is exquisitely rare liquid history, and of great quality.

Then there is the block of marsanne planted in 1927, now kept separate from the major annual release, and held in bottle for a prodigious seven years before release, the longest maturation for any Australian table wine; it is arguably as remarkable as the 100 years for each new vintage of Seppeltsfield’s Para.

The other two flag bearers are the twin Eric Stevens Purbrick Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon wines, the former largely from 80-year-old vines, the latter from vines with an average age of 40 years. Both these wines are held in bottle for four years, like the 1860 Vines, and released when six years old.

These wines are made in a winery that breathes history. The first underground cellar was constructed in 1860; the 'new' cellar in 1875, running at right angles to the first; and in 1882 the four-storey tower (still depicted on the labels of Tahbilk's commercial wines) was built, the first level used for winemaking until the 1940s.

The 227 hectares of estate vineyards with 16 varieties are planted on a 1214-hectare property that has a frontage of 11km to the Goulburn River and 8km of permanent backwaters and creeks. The spacious winery restaurant is perched above the river, and overlooks part of a 4km eco walking circuit of paths and boardwalks that wends its way through vegetation and trees full of birdlife, with the option of taking to electricpowered undercover boats for all (30 minutes) or part of the journey.

Alister Purbrick undertook a lead role in developing the First Families of Wine, which has been an unqualified success. He has served on wine industry boards and associations with clear-eyed intelligence, unafraid to express views different from the stance of some or all of his peers. Finally, he has guided Tahbilk through a decade of financial challenges impacting on every sector of the Australian wine industry. One aspect of this success has been the enhancement of what must be one of the most successful wine clubs, connecting Tahbilk with its thousands of loyal customers.

[View the Tahbilk winery listing.](#)

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Opening Hours

Mon-Sat 9-5, Sun 11-5

Established

1860

Dozen

100 000

Vineyards

hectares 221.5

Winemaker

Alister Purbrick, Neil Larson, Alan George

Previous wineries of the year

2015 [Hentley Farm Wines](#)

2014 [Penfolds](#)

2013 [Kilikanoon](#)

2012 [Port Phillip Estate](#)

2011 [Larry Cherubino Wines](#)

2010 [Tyrrell's](#)

2009 [Brookland Valley](#)