



Summertime thirst-quenchers

So many good wines, so little time. Fifty winemakers converged on St Kilda's notorious Prince of Wales band room last week as part of the Young Gun of Wine Uncut roadshow sweeping the country (events also have been held in Sydney and Adelaide, with another slated for Perth on Friday). Each vigneron brought with them two wines from their range to pour for the 250 thirsty members of the public who attended the event, before the best Yarra Valley-based wine industry rock 'n' roll covers band in the world, the Yeastie Boys, took to the same hallowed stage where Nirvana once smelled like teen spirit, and cranked their amps up to 11.

The Yeastie Boys took to the hallowed stage where Nirvana once smelled like teen spirit

Metaphorically stage-diving into the mosh pit of winemakers before hopping up on stage to join the Yeasties for a couple of numbers (a dream come true, for me at least), I managed to sniff, swirl and slurp my way through nearly all of the bottles — and a couple of flagons (more of which later) — on offer that day, and was very impressed by many of the wines, new releases from established labels as well as some I'd not come across before. I could recommend heaps, but you'll have to settle for highlights.

Among the familiars, I just loved the 2016 Bobar Royale (\$50), a gulpingly delicious, textural, wild-fermented, unfiltered young chardonnay from the Yarra Valley, the joyfully pretty and thirst-quenching new 2016 rieslings from Crawford River (the Young Vines version, \$30) and Best's Great Western (\$25), and the rich, layered, sun-kissed yellow fruit of the 2016 Lo Stesso Fiano (\$33) from Heathcote.

Keeping with the theme of summer refreshment, the 2016 Lark Hill gruner veltliner (\$45) from the Canberra district displayed some gorgeous, delicate floral perfume before delivering intense candied citron flavours, while the 2016 Fairbank rose (\$25) from southern Bendigo combined bright freshness and satisfying, lightly creamy texture on the tongue.

And if you're looking for good barbecue red wine drinking this summer, may I suggest Windowrie's brilliant-value 2015 The Mill Shiraz (\$20) from the central ranges of NSW, with its bright and crunchy red berry fruit; or the gutsier, more earthy, spicy complexity of the 2015 Turkey Flat Grenache (\$30) from the Barossa; or the vibrant black cherries and peppery gamy notes of the 2015 Giant Steps Yarra Valley Syrah (\$35).

Standouts among the newer (to me) names included the Grey-Smith Blanc de Blancs (\$42), a deliciously lemony, nutty sparkling wine from Mount Gambier; the 2015 Wilmee chardonnay (\$45), a brilliantly intense and tangy, mineral-rich white wine from a 35-year-old Macedon Ranges vineyard under recent new ownership; and the 2013 SubRosa nebbiolo (\$25), a deceptively pale red wine with surprising powdery tannic grip on the tongue — all classic savoury nebbiolo characteristics, really — from the Grampians.

I was particularly impressed by Flor Marche, a new West Australian producer making great wines from grapes sourced across the state's regions: I loved the beautifully precise and citrusy 2016 Malabre Great Southern riesling (\$25) and the wonderfully elegant but deeply flavoursome 2015 Elsie cabernet from Margaret River (\$35).

And finally, from Stuart Proud — Yeastie Boys' drummer and proprietor of Proud Primary Produce — I can recommend the fun, fruity, slurpy 2016 Up the Mountain Rose (a blend of chardonnay, shiraz and pinot noir) and the savoury, snappy, fish-loving 2016 Down the Coast pinot gris — not least because both are available in handy two-litre flagons. Priceless. How very retro — and how very appropriate for the sweaty, sticky-carpet pub-band legacy of the Prince.

younggunofwine.com

Seafood and bubbly time has arrived

Perrier-Jouet makes just 12,000 bottles of its vintage Blanc de Blancs cuvee a year. Hold the ice

STEPHEN BROOK



Summertime is the season of seafood and chardonnay, which suits Perrier-Jouet.

The champagne house, established in 1811 and a favourite of Oscar Wilde and Princess Grace, hopes its vintage cuvee Perrier-Jouet Belle Epoque Blanc de Blancs 2004 finds favour with an increasingly champagne-thirsty Australian public during the festive season.

Blanc de Blancs, which eschews the traditional champagne blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier and is made solely from chardonnay, is a rare cuvee that is growing in popularity.

Rare means rare. Perrier-Jouet, the 10th largest champagne house, owned by drinks giant Pernod Ricard, produces about two million bottles of its Grand Brut NV annually and about one million of its vintage Belle Epoque. But the house makes just 12,000 of its vintage Blanc de Blancs cuvee.

"Blanc de Blancs is very specific and seafood from Australia is a wonderful match," says Herve

Deschamps, chef de caves of Perrier-Jouet, who visited Australia this month. "You can have it with Grand Brut or Belle Epoque but with Blanc de Blancs it is more pure.

"Blanc de Blancs is for me the best occasion in France. In the beginning of November as the scallops come on the market, sweet and meaty and they are wonderful with Blanc de Blancs."

Perrier-Jouet creates its Blanc de Blancs from a single harvest of chardonnay grapes from the Cote des Blancs area of Champagne. Wine critic Tyson Stelzer called its Blanc de Blancs 2002 cuvee "the most sublime creation of the house".

Flowers are centrally important to Perrier-Jouet. It prides itself on the floral elegance of its chardonnay, and showcases white Japanese anemone flowers on its art nouveau logo and etched on to the bottle of its vintage flagship Belle Epoque.

Blanc de Blancs production is rare, but limited edition bottles

featuring the collaboration with Japanese artist and glassmaker Ritsue Mishima are even rarer. The house revisited its art nouveau heritage for its latest release Ritsue Mishima Blanc de Blancs 2004, for which the artist created a transparent case of organic swirls to encase its traditional Japanese anemones bottles. Just 72 are available in Australia.

For the first time, a magnum of 2004 Blanc de Blancs was uncorked at an event at Goma, the restaurant within Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art.

"Goma chef Josue Lopez has a great understanding of the house," Deschamps says.

"The flowers he uses are from his garden so he knows them. He said he had to create the best seafood dish that he had ever created. He wanted to be very sure that the matches he created are equal to the champagne."

The house's local ambassador Chris Sheehy says of Blanc de Blancs, which locally is outsold by rose champagne cuvees: "It seems

‘For me, no. It is a fashion product perhaps for 10 years maximum’

HERVE DESCHAMPS
DISMISSES CHAMPAGNE ON
THE ROCKS



to be a style that we like. But the conversation at an enthusiast level is much higher with Blanc de Blancs; it starts at the top and trickles down. We are expecting it to grow as it does in France."

Perrier-Jouet is a victim of unexpected success — stocks are in allocation, effectively rationed as

the house is not able to meet demand. Like all champagne houses, Perrier-Jouet was rocked by the global financial crisis in 2008 and reacted cautiously. The house supplies 20 per cent of its own grapes through vineyards it owns, the remaining 80 per cent coming from independent growers it negotiates



Outdoor seating at the Sanctuary Chief's Camp at Botswana's Okavango Delta; Geoffrey Kent, below

THE ART OF SAFARI

A pioneering operator talks about the changing nature of African wildlife tourism

CHRISTINE MCCABE

The art of safari was honed in Africa in the early 20th century when big-game hunters such as Teddy Roosevelt, collecting specimens for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, travelled with hundreds of porters, gun bearers, dining tents and even a library.

Out of Africa author Karen Blixen was typical of the safari maven, toting her togs and books in a Louis Vuitton trunk. Back then safari was synonymous with hunting — indeed, this was how you rustled up dinner — and it was only 50 or so years later that specialist outfitters began to trade guns for cameras as they touted a more mainstream tourist clientele.

Geoffrey Kent was at the forefront of this vanguard in the 1960s and still leads the pack today. That's hardly surprising, given his rollicking Boy's Own childhood. Born on safari in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), his father a soldier of the King's African Rifles who spoke fluent Swahili, Kent honed his organisational skills (essential when taking hapless tourists bush) at Britain's Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

He founded his global travel company Abercrombie & Kent in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1962 with one LandCruiser and a posh-sounding,

"made-up" name. "We settled on Abercrombie because it was at the top of the alphabet," he says. This neatly placed it at the front of the yellow pages. "We set ourselves apart with a nice truck and sent our clients out for the day with drinks chilled in an ice bucket."

But Kent believed A&K could do even better, inspired in part by working as aide de camp to British general John Frost in Libya. Kent impressed him by organising a mobile fridge with the help of Corporal Taylor from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers to serve martinis and smoked salmon in the desert.

"Later I had this idea to create extended photographic safaris that had all the elements of hunting, and after seeing how the military camped with oil paintings and all that, I thought: 'Why can't we do this for everyone?'" Kent tells me. So while his parents were away, Kent raided the company's modest business bank account and set out on a shopping spree, buying a second-hand Bedford army truck, ordering tents from Scottish outfitter Low & Bonar and stocking up on pots, pans, Royal Crown Derby teacups and cutglass decanters.

TRAVEL



Corporal Taylor arrived to fit a freezer to the truck, Kent poached a chef from the Muthaiga Country Club in Nairobi and upped sticks for the Great Rift Valley to test-drive his mobile camp.

"Mobile refrigeration is the turning point," says Kent, "as it means we can head out for weeks."

He refined the speedy setting up of camp and tweaked the luxury elements: it might have been a bucket shower and drop too but there was a mahogany seat and copies of *Punch* and *Country Life* to hand, and the tents were decked with carpets and sprung mattresses, chilled martinis and chocolate cake.

Kent's first clients were a Texan couple who signed up on the spot for a 30-day tour of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda and the A&K mobile safari was born. Business developed rapidly, largely by word of mouth among Kent's polo-playing cronies in the US and Britain.

Today A&K has 52 offices worldwide, but its heart remains in Africa. Botswana has become the company's signature safari destination.

Kent first visited landlocked Botswana in 1968 when the safari gateway town of Maun consisted of little more than a small guesthouse, the district commissioner's office and a road cam airstrip. After organising a private tour for Prince Harry following the 1997 death of his mother, Kent obtained a concession on Chief's Island, the so-called predator capital of Africa in

the heart of the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Okavango Delta. He established an eco-friendly camp, one of three that A&K operates under the Sanctuary Retreats brand in the delta. Camp sizes and guest numbers are capped by the Botswana government. So the real luxury of being in the Okavango is that on an open-top game drive you won't encounter another soul; it feels like the Africa of Kent's childhood.

Sanctuary Chief's Camp reopened this year following a complete rebuild and the establishment of a stand-alone Geoffrey Kent suite. "It's so busy these days I can't get to stay," Kent says, laughing. "Everything I've learned about safari, I've put into this camp," he adds, arguably making Chief's the most luxuriously authentic camp in or out of Africa.

Ten enormous guest pavilions fan out either side of an open-sided lodge built around tall jackalberry trees, with a large deck, and pool, cantilevered over the wetlands. Each of the pavilions has a netted four-poster bed, coffee machine, dressing-room and large deck with private plunge pool overlooking the water and bush. The bathroom features a deep tub and indoor and outdoor showers stocked with sweet-smelling unguents.

It's a long way from the original A&K long-drop loos and this much luxury surely would have made Blixen blush, but there's no mistaking you're in the remotest of African bushland.

Light aircraft is the only way in,

baboons squabble on the deck, lions roar at dawn and elephants pop their trunks over deck railings. Communications are restricted to a bedside walkie-talkie or a horn to blow in the event of an emergency. Food remains central to safari, with meals taken alfresco in the boma or on the deck while jolly barmen George and Duma whip up the G&Ts and martinis.

But the real magic of this camp is the staff, especially the local expert guides. "Local people are critical to the success of the enterprise," says Kent, who plans to use Chief's as a template for the ultimate camp, "the future of safari". A&K will operate it like a "land-based cruise ship", a base for wider touring, he says, and next year will be developing a range of activities located within 240km of the camp, including light plane excursions to Victoria Falls on the Zimbabwe-Zambia border. This means guests can stay a week or more without the need to move from camp to camp.

A&K's refrigerated truck may have been mothballed, but the modern-day four-wheel-drive safari fleet retains the icebox and portable bar model. Because safari isn't safari without sundowners in the bush.

Geoffrey Kent's autobiography, *Safari: A Memoir of a Worldwide Travel Pioneer* (\$38.90), is available from booktopia.com.au.

sanctuaryretreats.com; abercrombiekent.com.au

THE FAB FOUR: LUXE SAFARI LODGINGS

Belmond Eagle Island Lodge, Botswana

Reopened a year ago following a 10-month rebuild, this exclusive lodge, located on a private island in the heart of the Okavango Delta, features 12 tented and thatched suites, each constructed on a raised wooden platform with a rim-flow plunge pool. Interiors by London-based firm The Gallery have an Out of Africa vibe with local fabrics, reclaimed timbers and a minibar designed like an explorer's toolbox. The delta-view ensuite has a large tub and outdoor shower.

Sundowners are taken at the Fish Eagle Bar and game drives are augmented by barge, motorboat and mokoro (dugout canoe) excursions, with helicopter safaris also available. belmondsafaris.com.

Chobe Water Villas, Namibia

Separating Namibia and Botswana, the Chobe River is home to the highest concentration of elephants in Africa — 50,000 by one estimate. At this new riverfront lodge you won't need to leave your private terrace to view water-adapted wildlife including hippos, crocs, antelopes and those beguiling jumbos. Accessible only by boat, the 16 stilted suites line the northern bank of the river; interiors by South African firm Design Union feature custom-made furniture and indigenous textiles; floor-to-ceiling glass doors open on to private terraces with 180-degree river views. The main lodge has a restaurant, bar and library lounge, along with a river-facing infinity pool. chobewatervillas.com



The Highlands, Asilia Tanzania

Set high on the slopes of the Olmoti volcano in a remote part of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, this new, eco-savvy camp looks like a lunar outpost, with accommodation in eight canvas domes tucked into the forest. Each habitat offers an ensuite, a fitout by Cape Town-based design team Artichoke (think Masai fabric cushions and faux fur throws) and a large Perspex window and terrace offering long views to the Serengeti. The camp is set at 2590m so nights are chilly and wood fires available. Activities include game drives, a hike to the floor of the Empakaai Crater to see flamingos and visits to nearby Masai compounds. asiliaafrica.com.



AndBeyond Matetsi River Lodge, Zimbabwe

A multi-million-dollar overhaul of this luxury lodge near Victoria Falls has resulted in the opening of two camps of nine suites each, following the conversion of a former hunting concession into a wildlife haven complete with national park and private anti-poaching patrols, and the digging of 14 new waterholes. The riverfront digs are super smart, decorated with

traditional abstract carvings, and the inventory includes a sole-use four-bedroom villa with a dedicated team including guide, chef and butler. Lodge facilities cover a safari shop, gym, massage pavilion and 20m-long infinity pool perched above the mighty Zambezi River. andBeyond.com.

with. "The forecast wasn't there and I didn't buy more grapes," Deschamps says.

All Perrier-Jouet styles are available at venues including Hayman Island's One & Only resort, Brisbane's Eleven Rooftop Bar, Cafe Sydney, Bistro Guillaume in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney, Dinner by Heston in Melbourne and The Langham in Melbourne.

Deschamps is aware of the trend for champagne served over ice, launched by rival houses Pommery and Moet & Chandon. But he is not a fan of the drink, made extra sweet to complement the lower serving temperature. He says: "For me, no. It is a fashion product perhaps for 10 years maximum."

"For me it is not champagne within a pure tradition. It is wine — but with sugar it loses part of its elegance."

The limited edition Ritsue Mishima 2004 Blanc de Blancs is available for \$599 at select stockists including David Jones.