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W I N E S

Chris Ringland - Grand Master of Shiraz

Since Robert Parker's introduction of Chris Ringland to a broader and global wine community in the 1990s, especially in the United States and Asia he has evolved as a rockstar. Although his wines are sought after by collectors around the world, this man, despite his impressive physical appearance, has absolutely nothing in common with a self-promoting showoff frequently to meet in the global wine scene. Encounters with Chris represent him as unpretentious and rather shy, extremely reflected, with intellectual vocabulary and subtle humor. The almost thirty years that this native Kiwi has spent in the German culturally influenced Barossa Valley have left their marks. Although Chris Ringland has no German ancestors, his little estate is run immaculately reminding of the southern German „cleaning week“. No shoe sole will ever step into his private rooms that are also used for tastings. Charmingly guests are asked to take off their shoes in front of the house and to place them neatly into the open closet next to the Ringlands' own pair of shoes, one pair of sneakers and a pair of hiking boots patinized by usage. Chris Ringland is a discreet aesthete with a sense for what truly matters.

Deeply thought through but low key, decisive but unaggressive, courageous, pushing the envelope to the max, always creative and at times provocative, humorous, full of surprises but also predictable, with perfection in every detail, this all is Chris Ringland. He focusses with wine on what truly matters – which for him is the fruit. His skill to work out tannins with enormous fruit carrying capacity and at the same time uniquely precise and silky in texture is evidence of his meticulous care.

He leaves nothing to chance and even the corks for his Chris Ringland Shiraz (previously Three Rivers Shiraz) are selected in a time-consuming procedure to identify those which are eligible for sealing his „artworks“. He does this exercise every year not alone but together with a friend to have a corrective for his own judgement. Two days are sufficient since in any given year only around 1,500 bottles and 100 magnums are filled. Chris Ringland is neither a dogmatist or wiseacre nor a selfintoxicated character that is occasionally found in the wine scene. Much rather he is a human being that is always ready for self-criticism in order to achieve that what really drives him: improvement as a motto of life. His longtime friend and winemaker, the Austrian native Rolf Binder, owner of a large family estate in Barossa Valley, puts it when characterizing Chris quite nicely: „We are yet to make our best wine.“

„Sensitivity and intuition are no surrogate for professionalism, but can complement it“, says Binder and Chris Ringland has both of which at his disposal in a vast amount. As a tender-aged teenager in New Zealand he met Reiner Eschenbruch, head of the research institute at „New Zealand Department of Scientific and Industrial Research Viticulture“ in Te Kauwhata. With this fatal encounter his deeper interest in wine was woken up. The Germa-rooted expert with intellectual charisma motivated Chris to study Oenology at the University of Southern Australia. He told his protégé never to loose sight for the importance of scientific access to the creation of an outstanding wine. This academic approach has shaped Ringland and characterizes the winemaker until today.



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The second key influential figure affecting the life of Chris Ringland as a winemaker is Robert O'Callaghan, the charismatic founder of „Rockford“, the center of gravitas for the Barossan wine avantgarde in the 1980s and 1990s. After his studies, the Kiwi Ringland decided to stay in his new homeland Australia, of which he had become a citizen just a few years ago, and to follow O'Callaghan on his estate where he worked as junior and later as chief winemaker. Unique wines were created during this inventive period not only at Rockford but also e.g. at „Greenock Creek“, the legendary estate which Ringland and O'Callaghan advised in its first attempts to produce top quality wines. During these years Chris Ringland did not only develop his distinctive and unique style, but also the entrepreneurial desire to make his own wine. O'Callaghan understood, supported his drive and let him leave after Ringland had borrowed money to purchase a vineyard in Eden Valley. Up and until today, the two, which belong to the defining figures of Barossa region, have stayed on as friends.



No matter whom you ask, be it Craig Isbel, the young aspiring winemaker of upcoming estate „Torbreck“, or Christian Canute, junior head and winemaker of „Rusden“, who has received his education from Ringland at „Rockford“, every single one speaks with utmost respect of Chris Ringland and vice versa. Jealousy seems totally absent in this community. A truly pleasant and rare phenomenon in today's world and crucial part of the special atmosphere in Barossa. This atmosphere is best experienced during a dinner at „Ferment Asian“, a restaurant with excellent Asian kitchen and an outstandingly well-sorted wine list with more than a thousand positions from all over the world. It is here where people who have something to say or want to have something to say in Barossa meet: The region's best cooper as well the vintners and traders. In this community Chris Ringland evidently feels at home. As a counterpart to the 1996 Chris Ringland Shiraz that was tasted the day before we are drinking another great Ringland wine off the menu, the 1996 Flaxman Valley Shiraz from Rockford. In that year Ringland had to sell the grapes from the northern half of his vineyard to Rockford but vinified them himself. It is an electrifying and unforgettable experience to drink both halves of the same vineyard: What belongs together, comes together. A great moment, that due to the lack of paper, had to be manifested on the paper table cloth.

At the „Ferment Asian“ one can get to know Chris Ringland's mischievous side. So he has devillish joy for mocking e.g. the local newspaper time and time again with made-up stories. Once he was sitting in his favorite pub that was currently defrosting the air condition and had broomed heaps of ice into a corner. He took a photo of it and sent it to a local newspaper with the comment that this was taken at his vineyard. Next days front page said: „Natural phenomenon: Historic hail storm over Ringland's vineyard – unprecedented sight of destruction.“ Or another story with the dog chew bone that fell into his hand while working in his vineyard. He sent the piece to the paper in order to read the other day as the papers headline: „Sensation: Human remainders from Stone Age found on Ringland's vineyard.“ He laughs: „It's all about perception.“