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*Wine by Farr*





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“I call '17 a racy vintage for us,” says Nick Farr with a slight chuckle. Raciness is relative, and Bannockburn and Bernkastel, say, work off a different scale. But still it's clear what he means when experiencing the purity and acid drive in the Chardonnay. The Viognier, too, has superb varietal complexity with a buoyancy and freshness that few manage to achieve with this grape. “I think you can see the fineness, texturally, and more detail because it was a really prolonged growing season,” he adds. “It just didn't get overly warm at any stage and it dragged on and on.”

Indeed, it was the latest finish to harvest ever for the Farr family. It was all about rain in the early going. It rained during pruning and the Moorabool River flooded. It rained during budburst and the Moorabool River flooded. Then it rained at Christmas and created more humidity than the FARRS have ever seen in Bannockburn. Throughout the growing season everything was happening in a timely fashion if not a little late - which was fine as they had their work cut out keeping up with the growth at some stages.

“As we moved towards harvest the vineyard was looking amazing after such great rainfall and a very mild summer,” says Nick. “Expectations were very high.” As it happened, harvest started on 9th March - about a week later than normal.

After three significant rain events during March and April they finally finished picking Shiraz on 24th April - all in all, the latest finish ever for the family. “With extended time and cool ripening conditions, we're very happy with the results that aren't dissimilar to 2016, yet with greater finesse,” says Nick. “Good acidity and structure and, best of all, savoury and elegant, fruit flavours.”

The reds here are from 2016, and they show gleaming, lifted fruit shaded in with soil minerality, suede tannins and whole-bunch notes. For a vintage characterised by plushness and richness, the subtle detail and structure of the Sangreal, Farrside and Shiraz are particularly noteworthy. Drinking beautifully straight out of the blocks, Nick is spot-on when he says the finished article is, somewhat counter-intuitively, similar to '17, with extremely fine, mineral-driven wines. The 2016 scene was dominated by fluctuating temperatures and conditions. Overall though, it was quite mild, albeit with some warm periods thrown in. Good rains and thunderstorms arrived chez Farr towards the end of January, which maintained vine health to a much later picking date than initially expected. Harvest began in earnest in the first week of March, with the Farrside Pinot coming in on 31st March - two full weeks after Sangreal. As in 2015, the weather was highly favourable during the end of February, helping to slowly ripen the fruit and develop better structure and fine tannins.

At play here, of course, are exceptional sites with significant vine age. Sangreal celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday next year, and the Farrside vineyard will turn 15. Drought-resistant, vigorous rootstocks are the go, allowing the FARRS - who dedicate an inordinate amount of time to understanding and improving their soils - to make the most of Bannockburn's meagre moisture while keeping a healthy canopy to shade the fruit (you can count on the winds to take care of the disease pressure). What that means, too, is that here, now, it's what happens below ground that is the No. 1 factor in determining the quality and profile of the wines. That severely mitigates the influence of “vintage conditions” - and explains the FARRS' remarkable confidence in their winemaking decisions.

And that's also why this set of Farr releases will, once again, blow you away.



### **2017 Viognier by Farr LUC**

The Viognier by Farr is a blend of two vineyards. One is the original house block planted in 1994, which has friable red soil over limestone leading to sandstone—similar soils to the Sangreal Pinot Noir and By Farr Chardonnay. The second vineyard is a younger planting of unknown clones in red ironstone soil. The Viognier is a difficult variety to manage, with the tendency to grow horizontally rather than vertically, being very thirsty and having a tendency to become sunburnt very easily. This prompted Nick's decision to pick the fruit earlier to retain natural acidity while maintaining varietal character, creating a more delicate and refined drink.

Viognier is foot-stomped and left for two or more hours on its skins, to extract phenolics, flavour and texture. The fruit is then pressed, cooled and put straight into barrel with all solids for a natural fermentation. Malolactic fermentation is encouraged with gentle stirring during the end of autumn. The wine is then racked, fined, filtered and bottled 11 months after harvest.

### **2017 Chardonnay by Farr**

The Chardonnay by Farr comes from the same site as the Sangreal Pinot Noir. It's an exposed, hungry north-facing slope of red soil over limestone, planted in 1994. The Chardonnay vines are a mixture of Dijon clones and P58.

The fruit is picked by hand and whole-bunch pressed. All the solids are collected and chilled before being put to French oak barrels (30% new). A natural fermentation occurs over the next two to three weeks at cool temperatures. After fermentation, a bit of stirring helps start malolactic fermentation, which is usually completed by mid-spring. The wine is then racked, fined and lightly filtered before bottling 11 months after picking.

### **2016 Farrside by Farr**

The Farrside vineyard consists of black volcanic soil over limestone on a northeast-facing slope. The vine rows run east to west to shade the fruit from over exposure. It's a mixture of 114, 115, 777, 667 and MV6 clones. Although the Farrside and Sangreal vineyards are only 300m apart, the differing conditions mean that this vineyard is picked 10 to 12 days later. The darker soils and cooler growing conditions give a more masculine and edgy wine.

The fruit is hand-picked and sorted in the vineyard, then fermented in an open-top fermenter. Roughly 50% of the fruit will be destemmed and then cold soaked for four days. Nick uses only the natural yeast for the fermentation process, which takes roughly 12 days. Grape-stomping (known as pigeage) will occur two to three times a day depending on the amount of extraction required, and the wine is then placed in 50 to 60% new Allier barrels by gravity. It is racked by gas after secondary fermentation, then again at 18 months to be bottled.

### **2016 Sangreal by Farr**

The Sangreal Vineyard is the oldest planting (1994) on a north-facing slope of red ironstone on the surface going to limestone to bluestone below. The rows run north to south, gaining full sun exposure throughout the day and resulting in prettier, more perfumed wines. It's always the first vineyard to be harvested.

Sangreal is consistently made with 60 to 70% whole bunch and aged in new oak. It is fermented in a five-tonne oak barrel with an open-top fermenter, and cold soaked for four days before a natural fermentation of seven to nine days. Once the cap falls, the tank is pressed. The wine is racked only once after malolactic fermentation, then sulphured and bottled, the entire process taking a total of 18 months. The wine is unfinned and unfiltered in order to retain its natural flavour and bouquet. Sangreal is the most seamless and perfumed of the three single-vineyard Pinots.

### **2016 Shiraz by Farr**

Shiraz fruit comes from the original By Farr vineyard, planted in 1994. It lies on a north-facing slope, and the red volcanic soil has a base of limestone with deep-set sandstone.

All fruit is hand-picked from the VSP trellising, with about 15% left as whole bunches in the fermentation. Most years we co-ferment between 2 and 4% Viognier with the Shiraz, the date determining whether or not the former is co-fermented and bled back. It is a natural fermentation, with the fruit remaining in the tank for 19 days before pressing. Shiraz sees 18 months in French oak, about 20% being new, and is bottled under vacuum.

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### **2016 GC Chardonnay by Farr**

Medium yellow colour, with a slightly forward bouquet of toast, butterscotch, herbs and flowers. The palate is likewise slightly forward and open-knit, rich and generous, readily accessible and savoury with a long, drying warmth to its finish. The balance is good. There's lots happening here. A generous mouthful of classical Chardonnay. Wonderfully detailed bouquet and flavour: a superb wine. 97 points. Huon Hooke, The Real Review January 2018

### **2015 RP Pinot Noir by Farr - SOLD OUT**

This brilliant Pinot is one of the two top wines in the Farr stable. It's an exotic, decadent style which smacks of whole-bunch fermentation giving a herbal, root vegetable note to its multi-faceted perfume. Concentrated, opulent and fleshy: a totally satisfying drink. 97 points. Huon Hooke, Gourmet Traveller WINE June 2018

### **2015 Tout Près by Farr**

Only a touch over 2.5 acres, the Tout Près site has three individual soil types across a three-sided cirque that rises above the other vineyards. Each slope consists of a soil type. The largest slope is black volcanic soil of limestone, the second is quartz gravel mixed with red ironstone soil and the third, an iron strand in grey sandy loam. The clones that will acclimatise and mutate over time are currently 113, 114, 115, 667, 777 and MV6 to become the Tout Près clone. At 7,300 vines per hectare, Tout Près is the estate's original close-planted vineyard (hence the name, meaning "very cosy"). The soils and intense competition force the vines to work hard, resulting in fruit that is lush but masculine and provides the coveted structure found only in the most ageworthy wines. Tout Près is fermented with 100% whole bunches in a five-tonne oak fermenter. This wine has the flavour profile and intensity to absorb 100% new Allier French barrels. - Nick Farr