



T O R B R E C K

BAROSSA VALLEY

I managed to squeeze in a couple of vineyard visits during my afternoon visit with the Torbreck team of Ian Hongell (winemaker) and Nigel Blieschke (viticulturist).

At the Hillside Vineyard in Lyndoch, the core is an 1850 planting of Shiraz, but there are additional blocks amounting to 100 acres of the 300-acre property. The Hillside Grenache comes from a parcel planted in 1948. The dry-grown Laird Vineyard is the other Torbreck jewel. Originally planted in 1958 and purchased by Torbreck in 2013, this five-acre site in Marananga provides fruit for Torbreck's top bottling.

Contrary to some claims, Hongell offered this simple retort as we looked over the year's young shoots, "It's not dead." Looking at the current lineup, there are a couple of gaps: in 2016, neither the Les Amis nor the Pict were bottled because they were smoke-tainted, according to Hongell. The 2017 was a cooler year, offering more perfume and spice, said Hongell. "We're very pleased with the power we've been able to build into these wines. We're absolutely in love with what we're doing, especially in the vineyards," he concluded.

JOE CZERWINSKI

*Robert Parker*  
WINE ADVOCATE

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### 2017 RUNRIG

**RATING:** 100

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Shiraz, Viognier

As usual, the 2017 RunRig is approximately 2% Viognier. It spent almost 30 months in oak, 40% of which was new. Hints of peach or apricot appear on the nose, alongside notes of hickory smoke, cherries and baking spices. It's full-bodied and concentrated but supple and silky enough to seem lighter in the mouth, showing tremendous length and elegance on the finish, where it adds nuances of cinnamon and cocoa.



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### 2015 THE LAIRD

**RATING:** 97

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Shiraz

Torbreck's 2015 The Laird boasts explosive aromas of Christmas spices, ripe plums, vanilla, hickory smoke and maple syrup. It's a big wine, loaded with fruit and oak, full-bodied, rich and velvety, adding hints of toasted coconut and cinnamon streusel on the long, almost dessert-like finish. For a more savory experience, age it a decade or so before pulling a cork.

### 2017 THE DESCENDANT

**RATING:** 96

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Shiraz

Consistently one of my favorites in the Torbreck lineup, this year's version, the 2017 Descendant, was co-fermented with 8% Viognier and spent 18 months in barrel. It's full-bodied, rich and decadent, delivering what Torbreck lovers expect in its dark-fruited layers of opulence. Suffused with hints of Mexican chocolate, it finishes long and softly dusty.

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## 2017 THE FACTOR

**RATING:** 95

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Shiraz

Aged in 50% new oak, Torbreck's 2017 The Factor boasts hickory-like smoky aromas, plus plum and blackberry fruit. It's full-bodied and firmly built, finishing with hints of chocolate, licorice and dusty tannins. Give it another 2-3 years in the cellar, then drink it over the next decade and a half.

## 2017 THE PICT

**RATING:** 95

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Mourvèdre

Made essentially like the Les Amis Grenache, Torbreck's 2017 The Pict Mataro handles the hefty oak complement much better. It kicks off with scents of strawberries and vanilla, then adds cola and dark berries on the full-bodied, creamy-textured palate. From vines planted in 1920, it spent two years in 50% new French barriques but remains fruit-driven and long on the finish. It's a beauty. No 2016 was made (smoke taint).

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## 2017 LES AMIS

**RATING:** 93

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Grenache

No Les Amis was bottled in 2016, so the successor to the 2015 is the 2017 Les Amis Grenache, a wine that spent two years in 50% new barriques. It's smoky (like a barbecue pit), boasting lots of dried spices (akin to a dry rub) and cola. (What else would you pair with barbecue?) It's full-bodied and creamy, with some cherry-berry notes (so maybe it's Dr. Pepper, not cola), but the wood is a bit too dominant to make me truly swoon, adding dry tannins on the finish.

## 2017 HILLSIDE VINEYARD GRENACHE

**RATING:** 92

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Grenache

Matured for 15 months in a single 2,400-liter foudre, the 2017 Hillside Vineyard Grenache showcases exotic aromas of rose petals, black tea and strawberries, while some deeper black-cherry notes emerge with air. It's medium to full-bodied, with a rich, grainy texture and a potpourri of dried spices on the finish.

## 2018 MARSANNE

**RATING:** 92

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Marsanne

Sourced from the Descendant vineyard, the 2018 Marsanne is barrel-fermented and aged ten months in French oak. It's smoky, creamy and rich, with white peach and citrus flavors. Medium to full-bodied, it's velvety in texture yet long and crisp on the finish. I've been deliberately conservative in estimating how long it will age, but I wouldn't be surprised to see it comfortably cruising along at age ten.

## 2018 WOODCUTTER'S SHIRAZ

**RATING:** 91

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Shiraz

It's another successful vintage for this wine, which gives consumers a taste of the Torbreck style at a reasonable price. The 2018 Woodcutter's Shiraz offers raspberry and mulberry flavors, a full-bodied, plush, supple palate and savory hints of mocha and black olive on the finish.

## 2018 CUVÉE JUVENILES

**RATING:** 90

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Proprietary Blend

The unoaked 2018 Cuvée Juveniles is a blend of 67% Grenache, 23% Mataro and 10% Shiraz. It's ripe and full, verging on jammy, with black cherry and black olive aromas and flavors, supple tannins and a mouthwatering finish.

## 2019 WOODCUTTER'S ROSÉ

**RATING:** 90

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Mourvèdre

The coppery-hued 2019 Woodcutter's Rosé is 95% Mourvèdre and 5% Counoise, half fermented in barrel and half in tank. It's medium-bodied and creamy in texture as a result, with complex notes of peach, watermelon, strawberry and citrus. Subtle hints of white pepper emerge on the long finish.

## 2019 WOODCUTTER'S SEMILLON

**RATING:** 89

**FROM:** Barossa Valley, South Australia

**VARIETY:** Semillon

The 2019 Woodcutter's Semillon can't quite measure up to how I remember the 2018, but it's still a darn good drink. Pear and citrus notes dominate this medium-bodied effort. About 15% of the blend was barrel-fermented in old oak, so there's a slight creaminess on the mid-palate, then a long, mouthwatering finish.

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