

eat drink

For beach-loving Sydneysiders, 389 is the bus that takes them to iconic Bondi Beach. For wine-loving Australians, 389 is the Bin number of Penfolds' equally iconic red. Sure, Grange sits at the top of the Penfolds pile but at more than \$500 a bottle, it's for the very well-heeled. Penfolds Bin 389 Cabernet Shiraz is an affordable pleasure, even though it has now pushed through the \$50 barrier. The 389 represents the quintessential Australian red – full bodied and full flavoured with great longevity. It's perfect with a rare steak as a young wine and equally wonderful 10 or more years down the track with a decent chunk of cheddar.

The fact that 389 is a blend of cabernet sauvignon and shiraz is, for its admirers, of little consequence. But if it were created today, the cabernet sauvignon would probably be blended with merlot and its Bordelaise buddies – cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot. And the shiraz component would be spiced with viognier or combined with grenache and mourvèdre to create a lookalike southern Rhône blend.

Bin 389 celebrates its 50th birthday this year. Back in 1960, old-vine shiraz was plentiful in and around the Barossa Valley but cabernet sauvignon was in extremely short supply. And so this blend was born.

It's the synergy between cabernet sauvignon and shiraz that defines the style of 389 and created the internationally admired Great Australian Red genre. British wine commentator Robert Joseph describes the blend as Australia's greatest wine style and certainly cabernet sauvignon brings shape, structure and backbone to the blend, while the shiraz component adds the juiciness and sweet-fruited flesh.

And don't think Bin 389 hogs the limelight – there is a raft of wonderful cabernet sauvignon/shiraz blends out there. At the top end are the likes of Wolf Blass Black Label, Yalumba's The Signature and FDR1A, Neagles Rock One Black Dog, Majella The Mallee and Brian Croser's Tapanappa Whalebone. South Australia dominates the list of top cab/shiraz blends with good reason, as the state's warm growing regions provide the backbone of Australia's red wine production. Excellent everyday cab/shiraz blends abound, such as Angove Butterfly Ridge, McWilliams Inheritance and Hardys Nottage Hill, along with Bin 389's siblings, Koonunga Hill and Rawson's Retreat.

Koonunga Hill Claret was first made from the excellent 1976 vintage and, although it was a blend of shiraz and cabernet sauvignon, it was given the more common descriptor of "claret". If you happen across a bottle of the '76 Koonunga Hill, open it with confidence – it's still very much alive. To celebrate Koonunga Hill's origins, Penfolds have recreated the original marque, which carries the tag "Seventy Six", complete with a retro-look label. For around \$20, it's a cracker but then so are many Australian cab/shiraz blends.



It's time to celebrate the Great Australian Red, writes Peter Bourne.

Photography Jennifer Soo
Reidel decanter from Ultimo Wine Centre

wine

shiraz cabernet



2008 Penfolds Koonunga Hill "Seventy-Six" Shiraz Cabernet (SA), \$20

In 1976, Penfolds produced the first Koonunga Hill, recreating the blend 30 years later. The '08 follows in the mould with rich mulberry, cassis and dark cherry fruit flavours with savoury notes of dried herbs and a whiff of roasted malt. The palate is deep, held firm by sinewy tannins.



2008 Metala White Label Shiraz Cabernet (Langhorne Creek), \$23.50

The Metala vineyard was first planted in 1891 with the 1961 Metala Shiraz Cabernet winning the first ever Jimmy Watson Trophy. Sweet red berry fruit flavours abound with a lift of mint – a typical Langhorne Creek character. The tannins carry the finish to a satisfying conclusion.



2006 Glaetzer Anaperenna Shiraz Cabernet (Barossa), \$53

Ben Glaetzer is one of the Barossa's "young guns", producing some thrilling wines. This classic blend has an intriguing nose of chocolate, crushed herbs, cedar, blackberries and smoke, leading onto a tightly focused palate with fine-grained tannin and incredible density. The finish is fresh and lively.



2005 Majella The Mallee Cabernet Shiraz (Coonawarra), \$77

Brian "Prof" Lynn is one of Coonawarra's local heroes. His wines have a depth and intensity rare in today's world of "drink me now" wines. The rich mulberry, cassis and blackberry fruit flavours have an overlay of sweet chocolatey oak. A tight core of chewy tannins sustains the finale.



2005 Yalumba The Signature Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz (Barossa), \$51

In 1962 Yalumba created their first Signature blend, named in honour of Yalumba's founder, Samuel Smith. Samuel would approve of the 2005, a wondrous amalgam of dark berry fruits, toasty oak and liquorice allsorts with a good lick of dense, savoury oak.