

## FOOD.WINE.COFFEE

# Cabernet That Comes With Maximum Respect

BY CHARLES GENT



**J**ohn Struik really likes his Goat Track Shiraz, and so do a lot of other people. But the grape he really loves is Cabernet Sauvignon.

Proprietor and vigneron of Bendbrook Wines, Struik confesses to a deep-seated admiration for the noble variety. In good years, like 2004 and 2010, his Pound Road Cab repays the compliment, emerging as a wine of startling quality.

The judges of *The Adelaide Review Hot 100 South Australian Wines* elevated the 2010 version to their Top 10, describing it as “full bodied and fruit forward with pleasing black fruit surrounding a leafy core”. Struik, a big, bluff bloke, is more prosaic: he calls it a “stand-up wine”.

Bendbrook’s 10 hectares of vines grow on the slopes of an unobtrusive, idyllic valley just outside the township of Macclesfield, towards

the southern end of the elongated Adelaide Hills region.

Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon make up the two halves of Struik’s estate vineyard, and the varieties roll down opposing slopes to face off across the Angas River, the twisting stream that gives Bendbrook its name. Whereas Shiraz grows almost like a weed, Struik says he respects Cabernet for its complex personality both in bottle and vineyard: “It works so hard to be majestic, even in a bad year.”

According to Struik, most Shiraz can be made into something easy-drinking without too much effort. Cabernets, he says, are more demanding.

“Often they are too acidic; they can be thin depending on where they come out of; and often the balance is hard to get right,” he says. “You need a good winemaker to make an ordinary Cabernet well, whereas

an ordinary Shiraz most guys can play with.”

The fruit in 2010, however, was exceptional and did most of its own work. Then, as if to provide a cautionary tale, the 2011 season was “complete rubbish” and Struik’s Cabernet crop, while reasonable by the standards of the vintage, didn’t warrant making the Pound Road. The 2012, though, is looking good.

Struik admits there was an element of serendipity in the siting and layout of his vineyard, and hints that knowing what he knows now, he might have done things a little more scientifically. But due to what he calls “a weird kind of luck”, the underlying geology is making great wine grapes.

“No matter how good we are at making our booze, to be totally honest, it’s a matter of what we’re feeding them. And we’re not feeding them anything – they’re taking it from mother earth.”

And for anyone who doubts that small variations in terroir can have profound effects, Struik says you only have to taste the difference in flavour profiles between his wines and those of Longview.

“They’re just about within mortar range, but it’s a totally different belt of dirt.”