



wine 

WITH TONY HARPER



HIT GOLD ... Torbreck has released a winning formula in 2005 The Laird, a wine with power and elegance that will cellar well

## Lord of the valley

Torbreck's latest release sets a new standard, and price, for Australian shiraz

I have a soft spot for Dave Powell. He and his brand Torbreck have had their ups and downs, and at one time it looked like the dream was over with the company in financial strife. But Dave got cracking and raised the money to save his dream, and has spent the past decade turning it into one of the most respected and powerful wine brands of the Barossa.

His latest ploy has been the release of 2005 The Laird. If you haven't read about it, you have probably been in a coma; it is old-vine, single-vineyard Barossa shiraz that happens to be the most expensive current release wine Australia has produced. A bottle costs just a little more than \$700.

The fruit comes from vines that have been at Marananga since the 1950s, so they are old rather than ancient. And just how much (if any) bearing that distinction has on the eventual quality of the wine, I wouldn't care to guess. It's a subject that has had a fair airing in Australia, much of it, no doubt, propaganda thanks to the plethora of seriously old vines in this country and particularly in the Barossa. But the vineyards in France of both Chateau Petrus and Romanee-Conti have vines that average about 50 years, and they produce the greatest, and most expensive, wines on the planet.

The Laird is a seriously good wine. It leaves little room for doubt as to its origins as it reeks of the Barossa Valley. And, while it is a plush, rich, full-bodied red, it shows

restraint. It comes up a tad short of 15 per cent alcohol (although in Barossan terms that's hardly outrageous) but you'd be doing well to pick it. The alcohol sits quietly among the rest of the wine, and it manages that rare combination of power and elegance.

The fruit is framed by a wallop of oak, but it is seriously good French oak and it, like the alcohol, just weaves its way through the other facets. It is already complex and layered, with tremendous length and great balance. It should cellar for decades.

The obvious question is ... is it worth it? If you like Barossa shiraz and have the means to spend \$700-plus on a bottle of wine, then it emphatically is.

I tasted it with a bunch of other Torbreck wines, including the (previous) flagship, RunRig. Any debates over the worth of RunRig have been answered; it sells for \$250 a bottle and has been sought after for the past decade. Tasted alongside The Laird it looked like a \$250 wine next to a \$700 one, and I get the impression The Laird would do the same to just about any \$200 bottle.

Setting that price is both cheeky and making a statement – things Dave Powell isn't afraid to do. The upside is that he has delivered the goods and created a wine that has become an instant hit. And, given the fact that production is a mere 200 dozen and if subsequent releases maintain the quality, it is likely to become something of an Australian icon.

