

OUT&ABOUT



McLaren Vale gin tasting

Sample myriad gins in one of the finest wine regions of the country, writes Veathika Jain

Fox Creek Wines, 90 Malpas Rd, McLaren Vale, 08 85564779, foxcreekwines.com and The Salopian Inn, Main Rd, McLaren Vale, 08 8323 8769, salopian.com.au

LOCATION 40km south of Adelaide's CBD.
DETAILS Guided tasting of four different Australian gins neat and with tonic water at the Salopian Inn, while Fox Creek Wines offers a self-guided tasting of three different gins of the same brand.
AVAILABILITY Any time subject to reservation.
WHEELCHAIR ACCESS Yes.
PRICE \$35 at Salopian Inn and \$18 at Fox Creek Wines.
RATINGS 4/5 Salopian Inn and 4.5/5 Fox Creek Wines.



We are spoiled for choice when it comes to wine tasting in South Australia but when it comes to gins, the story is a bit different. A bit more preparation is needed.

My friend and I had been planning a gin day for a few months now and we finally got one Saturday that suited us both – but location was an issue. She was staying in Victor Harbor and wanted somewhere midway, so we agreed on McLaren Vale.

Obviously McLaren Vale is one of the best places anywhere to go wine tasting – but gin? I asked the same question but I was up for a research challenge and found a few places ... and so began our gin crawl.

Our first stop was Salopian Inn, which I'd called twice the previous day to book but the process seemed confused. In the end we decided to just turn up and take a chance. We knew if we arrived before lunch they might be able to do it, and indeed they did.

There were four different gins each with a different tonic water to taste.

We started with the Blind Tigers gin that was a classic London Dry gin, went on to a Navy strength Four Pillars gin with 58.8% alcohol, moved to an exclusive Old Tom gin made by his exclusively for the Inn and finally Settlers Sloe Gin. Our guide spoke about the aromas, palate and gave us a brief history of how the gin came about.

The Navy strength was very high in alcohol and adding tonic made it more palatable. The Artisan Sloe gin, which is fruity, zesty with hints of pepper, was paired with ginger ale instead of tonic water. The ginger ale enhanced the herbal and zesty flavour and was our favourite combination.

The 10ml pours were to be first tried neat and then whatever was left could be enjoyed with tonic water. In most cases, we poured way too much tonic water. A better option would have been to receive a separate 10ml pour for tasting with tonic, or a 15ml pour for a combined tasting.

The guide was knowledgeable and the

gins were eclectic. However, the bar got a bit noisy and we had to strain to hear the stories by the third gin. Still the range was interesting, but we would have liked bigger pours.

The next stop in our tasting tour was Fox Creek Wines, which had a table available for us, with three varieties of Two Accents McLaren Vale gin for us to try.

The oak-barrel table was already set-up with paper mats explaining the gins, the suggested garnishes with each one, and a brief description of each one.

This self-guided tasting had 15ml pours of each of the three gins we were going to try, a tonic water bottle, ice cubes and a garnishes board for us to make our own drinks.

We started with the Two Accents Dry gin, which was smooth to try neat. We then added ice and tasted the same and then added the garnish and tonic water. We did this three-tiered tasting for all the gins and discussed their comparative merits after every tier. The second and the third gins were Shiraz gins made from Fox Creek Wines Shiraz. The second was pink, while the third had a darker pink tinge as it was a barrel-aged shiraz gin.

The tiered tasting was so different as the ice adds subtlety to the gin, while the tonic water and the garnishes gives it a totally different taste.

The Shiraz gin was smooth to taste neat, but when we added ice, the warmth came out and the tonic and dried apple garnish intensified the citrus and caraway tones.

This self-guided tasting was so much more fun as it gave us all the tools beforehand for us to try them out the way we wanted. We set the pace, discussed the gins for as long we wanted and could make our own concoctions. The value for money and the experience of gin tasting at Fox Creek Wines was spot-on.

So gin tasting in wine country? It was a success with two distinct experiences.

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DEBORAH BOGLE



Garden path

Most of our house guests during the festive season were content to loll about indoors on hot afternoons. The exception was our niece, who, fed up with the chit-chat and endless cups of tea, declared her intention to make good on her promise to prune our tomatoes.

She donned her hat and clambered over the chook barriers into the vegetable patch. There was nothing for it but to follow, since I was keen to soak up the knowledge she's gleaned over the past couple of years of study and working in commercial market gardens.

Fortunately, I'd managed to string up some white shade cloth a couple of weeks earlier, so there was at least some protection from the blazing afternoon sun.

At Mossy Willow Farm, where Jess is currently working, they aim to prune and "sucker" their 600 tomato vines in the morning, when the plants are brittle, thus allowing leaves to be easily snapped off and suckers pinched out by hand.

Trellising, or training, is done in the afternoons when the stems are soft.

I'd done some pruning earlier on in the season, but it had been weeks since I'd tended the tomatoes, so we needed to do both at the same time.

On Jess's recommendation, I'd planted them close together, but failed to follow up on the second part of her advice, which was to limit the flowering tips. The plants were heavy with fruit, but they had grown into an impenetrable thicket.

She set about thinning the leaves to allow more light and air movement, while explaining how to tell whether a plant is in a vegetative or generative (reproductive) state. The ideal is to strike a balance between the two. It's a constant juggling act for commercial growers, who employ various means to manipulate their plants.

Early in a plant's life, you want it to be vegetative, producing lots of leaf so photosynthesis can occur and you get a strong, healthy tomato. Typically, leaves are large and curved downwards at the margins. "It looks like it's on steroids," said Jess.

At this stage, you don't want them to go into a generative state, producing flowering trusses that will cause them to peak too early. When growing tips are close to the first truss, the tomato has moved into a generative state, she explained.

Once a plant has achieved sufficient growth, it can be steered towards its reproductive stage by stressing it, for example, by increasing the length of time between watering to allow the soil to dry out.

Ours had achieved the right balance with minimal intervention on my part, so we concentrated on pruning and pinching out suckers, and adding to the existing trellis, outgrown while my back was turned.

Once done, the heavy trusses of green fruit, newly denuded of their leaves, were visible from the back door.

When the heatwave hit a few days later, I worried about sunburn, but the shade cloth did the trick, and suddenly we were picking ripe tomatoes daily. Long may they last.