



CELLAR BELLA



THE WORLD'S WINE PRODUCERS ARE REALISING WE don't want to end up falling into the gutter or nursing a sore head after enjoying a couple of glasses of wine. Finally, the tide is turning against the 14.5% and 15% Australian reds that we once loved and there's a growing demand for lower alcohol wines. However, most lower alcohol wines have failed to make the grade thus far. Likewise, diet coke isn't a patch on the regular stuff. Undeterred, a Kiwi duo are determined to prove lower alcohol does not equal lower quality.

The pair behind the first-ever Kiwi low alcohol brand, Bella, are Tim Lightbourne and Rob Cameron. Hunky Lightbourne is the marketing brains behind the brand and has had an interesting career path from promoting hair dyes for L'Oreal to launching HP sauce in Romania - apparently bacon butties and brown sauce have not made it big in the former Soviet bloc. Cameron also has eastern European links having made wine in Moldova, Slovenia and Bulgaria. But it was a pub in London where the pair came up with the idea of Invivo. Three years later, they have given birth to Bella.

Bella is just 9% alcohol (the standard Invivo Sauvignon Blanc is 13.5%) and contains 30% fewer calories compared to the regular wine. So, for every 150ml glass, there's only 94 calories - that means I can have a drink after just 10 minutes on a treadmill. Speaking of fitness, Bella is sponsoring the New Zealand fitness awards but I don't quite think they'll be promoting exercising and drinking at the same time. It's certainly one for ladies that lunch who want a glass of wine but don't want to have a headache kicking in by 3 o'clock but the gents at Invivo are hoping it will also appeal to the health-conscious male population. Well, if it's acceptable to order a glass of rose or a slice of quiche, why not a low alcohol, low calorie wine?

The problem is grapes need to ripen fully to achieve flavour ripeness and if they are fully ripe, that means the resulting wine will have a moderate-high alcohol level (11.5%-15%ish). If you pick grapes before they are ripe, they tend to have the acid of a lemon (uugggh) and not much flavour. No-one wants that in a glass of wine. Growers are trying all sorts of fancy schmancy techniques in the vineyard to produce grapes that don't end in wines high in alcohol but I'll spare you the boring viticultural details. There's also some shiny machines you can put your wine in including a 'spinning cone' or 'reverse osmosis' unit, which by some scientific miracle allow you to remove alcohol from the wine. However, it's debated whether or not these machines also remove the flavour and finesse of the wine but that's for another time.

If there are 30% fewer calories and 30% less alcohol, does that mean there's 30% less flavour? Well, it's not bad at all (and trust me, I've tried many seriously bad lower alcohol wines). The Invivo is leaner with more concentration and depth of flavour than the 9% Bella. It is also dry whereas there's a touch of residual sugar in the Bella to provide balance. On the aroma front, the Invivo has lots of citrusy notes with some green capsicum and passionfruit while there's more pineapple and elderflower cordial on the Bella. I can certainly see it succeeding with the lunchtime crowd, and the city's health conscious mob but if I were counting my units or calories (I'm not), I'd rather drink 30% less of a standard wine. And just because there's 30% fewer calories and 30% less alcohol, it doesn't mean it's cheaper. In fact, it's \$1 more per bottle than the standard wine, retailing at \$19.95. Nevertheless, if you want to treat yourself without putting yourself through hell at the gym first or want to go easy on your liver, this could be the wine for you.

*Bella is available locally at La Vino, Sale Street, Longroom and Chapel Bar

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

Some wine styles are naturally low in alcohol. Medium-dry Rieslings from Germany's Mosel Valley come are usually around 8.5-9% alcohol. One of the best Mosel lookalikes in New Zealand is The Doctors' Riesling from Forrest Wines at 8.5% (\$21.99, The Wine Vault). Or, what about a sparkling Moscato? Gianni Gagliaro's 2008 Villa M from Piedmont (\$33, Glengarry) is a bright and breezy sparkler with grape and orange blossom aromas and comes in at a low 5% alcohol. While Pinot Grigio is a rather neutral wine, it tends to be moderate in alcohol too - around 12%. Try the textbook 2008 Santa Margherita (\$29, Glengarry). (REBECCA GIBB)

Ponsonby News is delighted that our wine correspondent Rebecca Gibb was named the Louis Roederer 'Emerging Wine Writer of the Year' last week.



ROB CAMERON, the Invivo winemaker and co-founder at the launch of BELLA held at Dallows at SALE ST

Swirl, slurp and spit (or swallow) your way through the world of wine with international wine writer, Rebecca Gibb.

Rebecca Gibb's Wine Workshop

Longroom, 114 Ponsonby Road, Ponsonby.

Saturday October 9th, November 12th and December 4th from 10.30am to 3.30pm.

More dates to follow in 2011.

Buy one get the second half price on all bookings before November 1st 2010.

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