

# AN honest DROP



*Natural, organic, vegan  
– ethical Australian  
winemakers are taking  
the world by storm*

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About ten years ago, a handful of Aussie winemakers began experimenting with natural wine. This movement challenged the conventional winemaking ethos and opened a space for critics to decry the term "natural wine" on the basis that it had no precise meaning. Natural wine, made out of organic grapes and without additives or elaborate technology, allows the wine to follow its own rhythm resulting in a drop that's less prescribed and more adventurous. Although all wine is made from grapes, not all wine is natural. In most cases, chemicals and additives such as milk, eggs, and gelatin are added throughout the process to get a smooth and consistent drop. And while people are sometimes naturally hesitant to change, Aussie winemakers such as The Other Right, Wobbly Boot

Vineyard and Alpha Box & Dice decided to go against the grain and create a drop for the people willing to try. "Grapes are the only ingredient in our wine," says Alex Schulkin, founder of The Other Right, a boutique winery in Adelaide Hills. There's no addition of yeast, adjustments, preservatives, filtration, or bacteria. "[The] wine is aged in old French barrels, then blended and bottled as is," he explains. Schulkin and his wife, Galit Shachaf, arrived in Australia in 2009 to study winemaking at Adelaide University. This is where they were taught how to produce wine in a more prescribed way. After a few weeks into his studies, Schulkin and Shachaf were introduced to James Erskine, who'd just started producing wine under Jauma.

"[Erskine] introduced us to the idea that there is more than one way to make wine, something that sounded revolutionary at the time," he says. "His wines tasted so vibrant and exciting, compared to anything we'd tried before. It naturally made us dream about doing it ourselves."

During this time, the couple also met Anton van Kloppe, Tom Shobbrook and the late Sam Hughes, who were pioneers and the trailblazers of what became known as Australian natural wine. Schulkin says there was so much enthusiasm, inspiration and creativity, that making natural wine only became a question of time. In 2012, The Other Right was born. After his introduction to natural winemaking, Schulkin realised that not only could natural wine taste absolutely phenomenal, but it also involved social, ethical and environmental aspects, "which all echoed with us", he says.

But producing natural wine comes with its own set of challenges. "In the conventional wine game, you can often fix problems after they'd occurred, with an arsenal of additives, fining, and filtration," he said.

Producers in the natural wine world have to be proactive, and try and foresee the challenges and act accordingly. Along with natural wine, consumers can now find organic wine, meaning the grapes were grown according to the ecological viticulture principles; minimal intervention wine, made on a small scale that involves some additives/ filtration; and vegan wine, where no animal products were used in the

winemaking process.

Alpha Box & Dice (AB&D) in South Australia's McLaren Vale region was created in 2008 as a laboratory for viticulture exploration. Here, all the wines are small batch, made with minimal intervention and are vegan-friendly. AB&D does add minimal sulphites to the wine however, so it cannot claim to be totally natural. The small-scale winery doesn't have its own vineyards but sources grapes from farmers across South Australia. Some are organic and biodynamic growers, and others have no winemaking experience yet plant the right vine at the right time. Additionally, Wobbly Boot Vineyard located in southern Tasmania's Coal River Valley is where Paul, Lynda and Isaac Williams grow and produce vegan wine.

Paul Williams says that when he took over the vineyard six years ago, it had been managed in a way that is probably common across Australia, which was utilising herbicides, pesticides, and treating wildlife as pests.

"That's how grape growing is generally done," he says. "We weren't comfortable with any of those things."

At Wobbly Boot Vineyard, the wines are made with no animal products. Williams instead uses a potato-based extract to smooth the wines.

"We feel that if you're a business, and you're providing customer service, you have an opportunity to demonstrate and provide information and knowledge," says Williams, adding "and do it in an ethical and sustainable way".



## NATURAL SUCCESS

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After Wobbly Boot Vineyard planted a new vineyard three years ago, the 2018 Riesling grew to become the unexpected favourite. The Riesling has "gone absolutely crazy," says Williams. "When people come in that's the one they nearly always end up taking... it just hits the correct part of the pallet."

At The Other Right, the 2018 Fawn is one of the top performers. The Chardonnay is described as a little buttery and a little nutty. "What makes it special is the vineyard, as it has consistently produced wines of meaning and purity," says Schulkin.

One of the standouts at AB&D is the Kit & Kaboodle 2017 Riesling / Chenin Blanc/ Gewurztraminer/Gruner Veltliner blend, which smells like gingerbread, pineapple and banana yet tastes like green apple and stem ginger.

