



The panellists for our pet nat and méthode ancestrale tasting were (from left) Sam Scott, La Prova; Alex Schulkin, The Other Right; and Ella Hoban, from Accolade Wines.

The fun and fizz of pét-nat and méthode ancestrale wines

With an increasing number of Australian-made sparkling wines made according to the pétillant naturel or méthode ancestrale technique hitting the market, the *Wine & Viticulture Journal* recently held its first tasting of the style.

Twenty wines were chilled and put before our tasting panel, which comprised Sam Scott, founder and winemaker of Adelaide Hills-based La Prova, and Alex Schulkin, scientist for the Australian Wine Research Institute and proprietor and winemaker for The Other Right, also based in the Adelaide Hills. Both winemakers have turned their hand to making pétillant naturel wines (aka pét-nat) and had wines in our blind tasting. Scott and Schulkin were joined by Ella Hoban, winemaker for Accolade Wines, based in McLaren Vale.

Not surprisingly for a style that has no official rules, the panellists spent some time discussing what defines a pét-nat or méthode ancestrale wine and whether there was, in fact, a difference between the two. A single fermentation completed in bottle was the key factor for both, they said, but after that, anything goes.



"Pét-nat is a technique rather than a style," Schulkin said. "There isn't something like sensorial guidelines that it needs to stick to. It can taste like anything as long as it's made in a pét-nat way and that means primary fermentation finishing in bottle. That's the only thing I can conclusively say that separates pét-nat from methode traditionnelle. After that, it may or may not be disgorged, it could be any colour, but it's the primary ferment finishing in the bottle that's unique. That doesn't happen with any other sparkling wine method."

Scott added: "The purist view of pét-nat is that it's a wine made with minimal interference and bottled at the end of primary fermentation to create and capture bubbles. There's a

range of winemakers' ideals on what happens after that. Do they want to get rid of crystals? How long do they want to keep it before they settle it so it's clean or cloudy? Should there be any additions of any type and, if so, what's the timing of those additions?"

Hoban questioned whether the completion of primary fermentation in bottle was equivalent to completing fermentation of primary sugars.

"Is it one consecutive ferment through to the end? Is that what it has to be for it to be considered pét-nat or can it be a ferment that's arrested at a certain amount of sugar and reinoculated to finish fermenting grape-derived sugars?" she asked of Scott and Schulkin.

Schulkin was of the view that a reinoculation didn't meet the expectations of a pét-nat.

"It has to be the same yeast that completes the fermentation. If you want to adjust the sugar, whether you catch the ferment by chilling it down and then warming it up again to finish fermentation, or let it go dry and add some juice back in, as far as I'm concerned both are equally valid. The main thing is the



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organisms that started the ferment in tank or barrel are the ones that finish off the ferment in bottle.”

Hoban questioned whether those organisms needed to be wild.

“Technically, pét-nat doesn’t have to be a natural wine,” Schulkin said. “It gets associated with natural wine and a huge proportion of pét-nats would be natural wine in some way. But I don’t think it has to be.”

While some use the term pét-nat interchangeably with méthode ancestrale, Schulkin and Scott said that based on their research they understood there were differences between the styles.

“From my understanding, if I had two sparkling wines, one was clearer and sweeter and the other was drier and cloudier, the pét-nat would be the drier and cloudier wine. The méthode ancestrale is the sweeter and clearer wine as those wines are filtered to take out most of the yeast so there’s just a little bit left to finish the ferment,” Scott said. “When I was thinking about whether we use the term méthode ancestrale or pét-nat on our wines, I found out that there were a lot of méthode ancestrale wines from south western France that would have 40g/L of sugar.”

Schulkin added the “jury was still out” on whether pét-nat and méthode ancestrale wines were one and the same style, but admitted they were “certainly very close”.

He said disgorging was an optional step for pét-nat or méthode ancestrale producers.

“I’ve tried really good examples that weren’t disgorged at all. For me the main reason for disgorging is so the wine doesn’t gush because tartrates provide an excellent nucleation point. That’s why we’ve disgorged everything for the last three years.

“We cold stabilise naturally — 0°C in the shed over winter. Once the crystals form that’s when we disgorge, when the wine is still cold.

“In our wines the crystals that form in a bottle are sometimes that long,” he said, indicating the length of a regular wine bottle with his fingers. “We shake the bottle so they [the crystals] all break and then turn the bottle upside down so they settle in the neck.”

Schulkin said predicting the sweetness of a pét-nat required a level of guesswork.

“I can’t speak for every winemaker, but in my world, because we can’t predict how dry the wine will go, we try to guesstimate what’s going to happen. We know it’s either going to be bone dry or there will be a few grams of sugar left. Because of that we try and bottle with a bit more sugar than we would otherwise.

“If we knew that everything was going to be bone dry we would aim for between 12 and 15 grams of sugar but because we’re assuming there might be up to five grams left based on previous experience, we could go a bit higher than that.”

Turning to the wines in the tasting, Schulkin said he was “really impressed with the overall quality of the wines”, saying this was somewhat unexpected based on the pét-nats he tasted recently.

“Last year there were quite a few pét-nats around that I tried and the quality was saddening. Now it seems like everyone has got on top of their homework and got the hang of it.”

He said the wines could be divided into five groups: some were muscat-like, some he described as “fruity lexia with bubbles”, some were cider-like, some of the rosés “tasted like a fine rosé with bubbles” - and “there’s nothing wrong with that” - and, finally, there were wines that “if I didn’t know they were pét-nats I would have said they were traditional style sparklings”.

Scott agreed the majority of the wines “looked really good”.

“The wines that appealed to me the most were bright and fresh and zippy and fun and fragrant and that was probably due to earlier picks that resulted in finer fruit flavours that just made for more elegant wines,” he said. “For the wines that were bigger and riper, people will still get a lot of enjoyment from them but they just lose that finesse.”

“I think a pét-nat is fun. You can smash it. You can use it in cocktails. It’s a good, fun drink. Once it gets too big it goes out of that zone for me,” Scott said.

Hoban acknowledged the diversity of styles in the line-up.

“You can see the diversity just in the range of colours in the wines and the range of clarity. There are some that are quite bright, fruit forward and simple. Quite a few are starting to show a bit of complexity. Some are less microbiologically sound than others. There’s also quite a distinct variation in sweetness in these wines. A few of them didn’t suffer a distinct sulfide character as such but some of the fruit characteristics did suffer because there was just enough sulfur to knock the edge off the brightness of the fruit,” she said.

The panellists agreed on five wines as the standouts of the tasting: Friends of Punch Rurale 2017 Pét-nat, La Prova 2020 Pét-nat, Astro Bunny 2020 and two from La Violetta — 2020 Patio Nat and 2020 Spunk Nat. **WVJ**





FRIENDS OF PUNCH RURALE 2017 PET NAT
Chardonnay, Savagnin
11.5%v/v
RRP\$32.00/bottle

Best of tasting: Bright pale straw in colour. Bright and lifted nose of citrus, pears, fresh leeks, white florals and a touch of toast; perhaps a touch of reduction. Super soft fizz that's persistent. Clean, almost pure palate which features lemon and lime characters. Snappy acid with good flow. Good length. "A party starter next to the beers in the esky," described one taster. "One of those wines that there aren't a lot of super special things to say about it but that really makes it quite special," said another. "A really nice wine."



LA VIOLETTA 2020 PATIO NAT PET NAT
Muscat, Riesling
12.2%v/v
RRP\$37.00/bottle

Best of tasting: Cloudy salmon in colour. Peach, jubes, bruised apple and muscat on the nose; almost Frontignac-like, thought one taster. Good fizz. Clean, soft and juicy which is full from the lees. Bright fruit and snappy acid. "A pre-gin aperitif," noted one taster. "A fun drink," said another.



LA PROVA 2020 PET NAT
Barbera
12.9%v/v
RRP\$28.00/bottle

Best of tasting: Cloudy but translucent salmon in colour. Fragrant, complex and lively nose; slightly fruity on the stone fruit side. Good fizz. Juicy, generous and mouthfilling palate. Bright, crunchy acid. Zippy and long. One taster felt the nose and mouth were somewhat volatile, feeling the volatility made the palate sour and short.



ASTRO BUNNY 2020
(Pre release sample)
50% Fiano, 20% Zibibbo,
15% Arneis, 15% Nero d'Avola
12.0%v/v
RRP\$37.00/bottle

Best of tasting: Slightly cloudy salmon colour. Somewhat subdued, floral, skinky nose; red berry and cherry notes apparent; touch of aldehyde. Clean, dry, fresh, flavoursome, structural and mouthfilling palate. Grippy tannin. Hopsy finish. "A solid wine," said one taster. "Lots of fun; lots of things that make no sense on their own but all put together make it a winner," said another.



LA VIOLETTA 2020 SPUNK NAT PET NAT
85% Riesling, 15% Shiraz
12.5%v/v
RRP\$37.00/bottle

Best of tasting: Bright pale pink in colour. Notes of strawberry, watermelon, quince and fairy floss on the nose; slight leesy character. Bright and candied palate; red and pink fruits evident. Good fizz. Soft acid. Slight waxiness in the mid palate. "Like a rosé with bubbles," said one taster. "For the flavour seekers," said another.



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**VALENTE 2019
PET NAT**

Chardonnay, Savagnin
12.3%v/v
RRP\$25.00/bottle

Cellar bright, moderately cloudy, pale straw with a lemon yellow leaning. Cider and fresh apple juice notes on the nose along with white florals. Two of the tasters detected some minor H₂S. A light spritz. A bit broad and oily on the palate which has a mineral edge. Chalky mid palate. Touch of Brett in the background. Not overtly fruity. Austere, firm and textural style. One taster thought the appeal of the wine may have improved with some more bubbles and a bit more zip. Another said a bit of a play with the serving temperature could significantly improve the wine, such as serving it really cold on a sunny day.



**QUEALY 2019 SECCO
SPLENDIDO METODO
ANCESTRALE**

Moscato Bianco
13.0%v/v
RRP\$35.00/bottle

Quite clear and bright; pale straw in colour. Fresh, fruity, vibrant, simple, but appealing nose featuring white floral and tropical notes like lychee. Sweet palate with a muscat-like finish. Lovely mouthfeel and fizz. Nice texture on the mid palate. Tight, zippy finish. "Fruity lexia with bubbles," described one taster. "Great for tropical fruit flavour seekers," said another.



**FRIENDS OF PUNCH
RURALE 2016 PET
NAT**

Chardonnay, Savagnin
12.0%v/v
RRP\$32.00/bottle

Bit yeasty, almost on the autolytic side. Apple-neutral aromatics Bit of an oxidative character on the nose which has scalped a bit of fruit flavour. Clean palate with good texture. Fruit is a little bit on the lean side, but works well with this wine. Hint of bruised apple. Fresh acid line and flow. Creamy and soft mousse. One taster remarked that this wine would benefit from being served super cold.



**GILBERT 2020
PETILLANT
NATUREL RIESLING**

11.5%v/v
RRP\$26.00/bottle

Cloudy, pale straw in colour. Honeysuckle, soapy florals, fresh lees and a slight muscat-like character on the nose. One taster thought some H₂S was overshadowing the fruit. Good fizz. Bit grubby on the palate but some nice flavours around it. Waxy mid texture. Crunchy acid line. A bit soapy with fruit tingle acidity on the finish.



**THE OTHER RIGHT
2020 BRIGHT YOUNG
THING WHITE**

100% Chardonnay
11.3%v/v
RRP\$33.00/bottle

Bright pale straw in colour with green tinges. Nose is a touch on the yeasty side. Good soft fizz. Succulent palate; slightly sweet. Apple-like acid. Soft finish. "A real crowd pleaser," noted one taster. One taster detected a cheesy/sweaty character on the nose and mousey character on the palate, the latter possibly only evident after time in glass.



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**COMMUNE OF
BUTTONS 2020
PRETTY FUN PET
NAT PINOT GRIS**
11.0%v/v
RRP\$35.00/bottle

Cloudy but mostly translucent salmon in colour. Fragrant nose featuring light red fruits; slight Brett and sour notes. Good fizz. Florals and lychee characters on the palate along with some more Brett. Touch of tannin. Soft acid. "I could swear this is a Normandy-style cider," said one taster.



**TIM WARD WINES
2019 I'LL FLY AWAY
PET NAT**
11.5%v/v
RRP\$33.00/bottle

Yellow to marigold in colour. Skinsy nose; an appealing rancio/aldehyde character in a sherry-like way — honey and yellow rose aromatics integrate well with the aldehyde. Low fizz. Structural, rich palate but austere; Fino-like aldehyde and bruised apple present. A bit dull. A touch of mousiness which may only be apparent after being in a glass for a time. "This wine is lots of fun; probably my favourite in the whole line-up," noted one taster.



**FREEMAN 2019
PET NAT
RONDINELLA**
12.5%v/v
RRP\$25.00/bottle

Salmon to copper in colour. Reduction masked the aromatics initially before giving way to honey and red and pink fruits. Slight fizz. Touch of sweetness on the palate but a phenolic bitterness on the finish dries it out and carries it quite well. "Curious and elusive," noted one taster, adding "very juicy, very yummy and very easy". "Very drinkable," said another.



**GILBERT 2020
PETILLANT
NATUREL ROSÉ**
65% Grenache, 35%
Sangiovese
12.0%v/v
RRP\$26.00/bottle

Rose to Turkish Delight in colour. Fragrant, lifted and yeasty nose; potpourri character evident. Palate is fresh and bright and has mouth-watering acidity; notes of peach and florals. "If I didn't know better this is a traditional method sparkling rosé," said one taster. "Zippy, fizzy and fun; bright, light and fruity," described another.



**KONPIRA
MARU 2020 MT
MIDORIYAMA
CHEVAUCHER
L'ÉCLAIR PETILLANT
NATUREL**
40% Pinot Noir, 40%
Chardonnay, 20% Pinot
Meunier
12.6%v/v
RRP\$29.00/bottle

A touch cloudy but translucent salmon in colour. Lifted and fragrant nose of berries, pear and caramel. One taster thought the nose was a touch green and detected a slight ashtray note. Ripe red berries on the juicy, dry palate built around a zippy, fizzy shape; touch of sweetness. Slight pithy tannin on the finish. "Would go well with a charcuterie platter," commented one taster.



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**EXPRESS
WINEMAKERS 2020
FOAMO**

Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot
Noir, Pinot Gris
11.7%v/v
RRP\$32.00/bottle

Cloudy and barely translucent colour of salmon to rose gold. Ripe red berries on the nose; touch of oxidation; some Brett also evident. Dry, ripe and broad palate with some pleasant underlying fruit; aldehyde and more Brett also evident. "A farmhouse style," described one taster, adding, "I could totally enjoy this wine, very playful."



**CHANDON
2018 METHODE
ANCESTRALE ROSÉ**

(Pre-release sample)
90% Pinot Noir, 8%
Chardonnay, 1%
Meunier, 1% Pinot Gris
12.5%v/v
RRP\$45.00/bottle

Bright pale pink in colour. Fragrant nose of toffee apple and sour red fruits; slight VA lift and a bread crust character suggesting some development. Creamy, juicy, sweet-fruited palate; guava and fresh bread characters evident. Sugar and acid in check. Nice fizz and a snappy finish.



**SUTTON GRANGE
2019 FAIRBANK
ANCESTRALE
SPARKLING ROSÉ**

55% Shiraz, 45%
Viognier
13.0%v/v
RRP\$35.00/bottle

Bright salmon in colour leaning to orange. Aldehydic and therefore subdued nose; some pink grapefruit pith apparent. Soft fizz. Complex nose featuring bruised apple on the palate. "On the classical side, quite serious, showing that pet nat can be so many different things," said one taster.



**THE OTHER RIGHT
2020 BRIGHT YOUNG
THING RED**

55% Pinot, 45%
Chardonnay
11.6%v/v
RRP\$36.00/bottle

Bright deep pink in colour. Ripe red berries, red currants, raspberry coridal and Turkish Delight on the nose; a medicinal Brett character hiding at the back. Great fizz. Ripe and succulent red berries on the juicy palate. Tight finish. A bit short. "For people who want lots of flavour and fizz and ripe and succulent berries," said one taster, adding "a lot of people would love this."



**TIM WARD WINES
2020 I'LL FLY
AWAY PET NAT
LAMBRUSCO**

95% Lambrusco Maestri,
5% Syrah
11.0%v/v
RRP\$25.00/bottle

Deep, dark purple to red in colour. Black berries and currants on the nose which is a little acetic and sweaty. One taster thought the nose was reminiscent of a spicy porter beer. Rich and ripe dark berries on the dry palate along with a Ribena character; soft phenolics. Good length and finesse. A bit short and a slight Brett character evident. "An interesting wine," said one taster.



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