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# Torbreck: a deep dive into this important Barossa winery, with winemaker Ian Hongell

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It was back in 1994 that Dave Powell began a winery that was to prove very important for the Barossa Valley. He had entered the wine business by accident, after studying economics. He sold a Corvette in Sydney in 1981 and used the money to buy something, working many front vintages, before returning to the Barossa to work at Rockford in 1982.

Powell became aware of various old vineyards scattered around the Barossa, and he started buying them up and making wine from them. His first wines were sold in an English pub he had started with an Latvian, Phil Lehmann, and they were called Rhone Rangers, Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah, and in 1987 the first Torbreck wines were released, the 1986 Running with Thieves.

Torbreck grew considerably, and by the time I visited for the first time in 2004, they were processing 1000 tons, which is a significant quantity for a premium winery.

Some notes on the names. Torbreck is the name of the farm at Scotland where Powell worked as a shearer, and Running with Thieves was a book he was reading at the time he was working there. Lehmann's Stage is a tribute to Lehmann's Hill on Rockford. Footer's Folly is the gully into which the woolshedding operation. Descendant is descended from Running. It uses the old barrels from Running and the wines were tastings from Footer's Folly. Footer's Folly was a name given to the gully into which the woolshedding operation. Descendant is also a tribute to Dave shortly afterwards. It's also the name of the band Metallica's album that endeared him to the crafting system.

Torbreck's vineyards are small and unmanned them, and there in the winery made striking wines containing Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache, Mourvedre, Viognier, Marsanne, and Roussanne. Torbreck wines were often high in alcohol, but only caused comment, the uninitiated Rieslaus provided the balance and structure that these wines of serious intent.

The vast wall of barrels, Powell and Hongell with their pet dog in the foreground, and the Torbreck wines on show, with Lehmann's and Powell's pet dog in the foreground.

Powell retired in 1994, and Dave Lehmann took over the winemaking, and he ran it for about 10 years. Lehmann's wines were very good, but they were not as good as the wines made by Dave Powell. Lehmann left the company, but Torbreck has continued to produce acclaimed wines, under the stewardship of current chief winemaker Ian Hongell (pronounced almost, who pronounced his surnamed saying, including into vintage of 2020 and 2021.

Hongell emphasises that one of the reasons Torbreck are performing at such a high level is because of the close integration of vineyard and winery teams. Chief viticulturist is Nigel Blanchter. The two worked together for 8 years at Peter Lehmann before Blanchter moved to Torbreck in 2015, to be followed by Hongell in 2016. Blanchter is responsible for the vineyard management, and Hongell for the winemaking.

Initially, he says the Torbreck was the big Roussanne in public relaxed vineyard, with the big selling point that Kalleen Higher cropping years producing the best wines. So the rest decided to do something about this, and they started to bring in Roussanne, Viognier, Marsanne, Grenache, Mourvedre, Shiraz, and Syrah. There was concern about the same vineyard wine from a number of 20 years. Most of the grapes come from the western ridge of the Barossa, with 15% coming from the Eden Valley.

Torbreck bottles are sealed with screwcaps and stainless steel, and there in the winery made striking wines containing Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache, Mourvedre, Viognier, Marsanne, and Roussanne. Torbreck wines were often high in alcohol, but only caused comment, the uninitiated Rieslaus provided the balance and structure that these wines of serious intent.

They began by implementing no-till management, growing a self seeding cover crop of rye grass, clover, medics and legumes. They brought sheep in the growing season to control this, eliminating several herbicide sprays. They began using Trichoderma, a beneficial fungus, and they started using beneficial native species as an air conditioner, creating effective biodiversity to reduce the need for spraying.

Hongell says that they stopped using artificial fertilisers, and instead spread 12,000 m3 of green waste (forest mulch) and 1000 tons of dry spent cooler lees, and also add minerals. Ian Lehmann instead decided to provide nutrients.

To protect the old vines and ensure the future health of the vineyard they have employed Stewart and Sol to mark up grapevines, and these flies provide to 180,000 vines a year. They have 20 hectares of commercial vines, and goats in these old vineyards are filled by lapping. This is possible because there is no phylloxera in the Barossa. Sol is also a consultant to Torbreck, and has contributed taken from heritage vineyards, as well as 10 Rieslaus of Australia and Chancellor of Rieslaus.

Torbreck lees always used Valeria cold for their top wines. These lees kill yeast and are infinitely more fine. They come from Barossa Valley Cooperative Winery.

Harvest is quite late. Hongell is looking for flavour and phenolic stability, getting full physiological ripeness before the fruit collapses.

In the winery, fermentations are open-top, and are left to go cold for a few days before inoculating with yeast. Fermentation is left to adjustment on the skins, then a Stephen Leon pump-over is performed once before bottling. A cut Spanish aids of tannins and will has 1.5 g/litre.

The ferments are pumped over twice daily, and then when the wine is dry, it's based pressed, the press fraction is combined with the free run, and it goes to barrel. Malolactic fermentation is in barrel, and once this is finished, the wine is left on lees for 12 months, and then it is racked and left for another 12 months. After a decade sold, the cellar is adjusted, and it is left without topping up. Hongell feels this is a lot of unsatisfactory development, and then this is dealt with by the pre-bottling sulfur dioxide add.

**Torbreck The Steading Blanc 2020 Barossa, Australia**
15.5% alcohol. 60% Roussanne, 25% Marsanne, 5% Viognier. Juicy and bright with nice pear and citrus fruit. Compact, crisp and silent with a lemony edge. 92/100

**Torbreck Hillside Vineyard Grenache 2019 Barossa, Australia**
15% alcohol. A high vineyard rose' packed with dark red fruit with shale, quartzite and limestone. Supple and juicy with notes of redcurrant and red berries. Red Mediterranean fare. Supple and well balanced. 92/100



**Torbreck Les Amis 2020 Barossa, Australia**
13.5% alcohol. Glassgrained soils, western Greenock. Grenache. Rose weight and freshness with red cherry and redcurrant fruit, and a core of sweet fruit. Nice crunch here with a peppery edge to the herb fragrant fruit. 94/100

**Torbreck The Steading 2014 Barossa, Australia**
13.5% alcohol. Grenache 57%, Shiraz 23% and Mataro 17%. Complex and layered with a core of sweet berry and cherry fruit, with some herbal hints and a touch of pepper. A classic Barossa red blend, done really well. 94/100

**Torbreck The Pict 2020 Barossa, Australia**
13.5% alcohol. 100% Shiraz. Ripe and lush with nice depth, and a spicy lift. Warm, rich and lush, but shows Mataro-lively, peppery, spicy side too. Powerful. 94/100

**Torbreck The Pict 2019 Barossa, Australia**
13.5% alcohol. 100% Shiraz. Ripe and lush with nice depth, and a spicy lift. Warm, rich and lush, but shows Mataro-lively, peppery, spicy side too. Powerful. 94/100

**Torbreck The Laird 2014 Barossa, Australia**
14.5% alcohol. Shiraz 92% and Viognier 8%. Complex and layered with a core of sweet berry and cherry fruit, with some herbal hints and a touch of pepper. A classic Barossa red blend, done really well. 94/100

**Torbreck The Descendant 2021 Barossa, Australia**
13% alcohol. 34% Shiraz, 0% Viognier. From Marananga. 20 months in barrels previously used for Running. This is lush, ripe and rich with blackberry and black cherry fruit. Rich, rich and dabed with sweet ripe fruit showing blackberry, black cherry, and some exotic Viognerian, showing hints of apricot richness, and then charcoal and smoke on the finish. 94/100

**Torbreck The Descendant 2020 Barossa, Australia**
13% alcohol. 34% Shiraz, 0% Viognier. Lush, ripe and rich with lovely softness to the lush blackberry fruit. Spicy and rich with some floral and apricot notes, as well as liquorice notes and black fruit. Theatre, Freshness and Royalty here. So enticing. 94/100

**Torbreck The Descendant 2003 Barossa, Australia**
15% alcohol. 90% Shiraz, 6% Viognier. Amazing floral aproot, black cherry and blackberry fruit on the nose. So sweet. This palate has dark black fruit drop great definition, with a slight gravely, savoury edge. 96/100

The Factor is Shiraz from four sites, two of which Torbreck own, in Greenock, Kroemer, Marananga and Greenock. Many of these vines were planted in the 19th century. Two years in barrels. 40% new (French oak).

**Torbreck The Factor 2021 Barossa, Australia**
15% alcohol. Rich, vital and spicy with nice density. Ocean black cherries and plums with some oak adding an extra layer of spice. Rich, ripe and lush, but with some tannins. 94/100

**Torbreck The Factor 2020 Barossa, Australia**
15% alcohol. Rich, focal and aromatic with rich blackberry and black fruit. Grippy and structured in the middle, but the fruit is ripe and lush, with hints of liquorice. Textural and fleshy spice. 93/100

**Torbreck The Factor 2019 Barossa, Australia**
15% alcohol. Rich, focal and aromatic with rich blackberry fruit and some softness. There's a rich texture and density here and fresh fruit. 94/100

Running is Shiraz from old dry-grown vineyards. The first release was from a single vineyard, but now it comes from a number of vineyards, including the Kalleen vineyards. The vineyards were planted between 1900 and 1920. Francois Lab maceration. 50% new.

**Torbreck Running 2021 Barossa, Australia**
14% Shiraz, 3% Viognier. Fresh, bold and rich with sweet black cherry and blackberry fruit, and some salty, savoury notes. Rich and lush, but with a lot of fruit. Fresh and delicious in the mid-palate, with fine tannins but plenty of fresh, thrilling salty with some iodine, and a lot of lovely exoticism. 95/100

**Torbreck Running 2012 Barossa, Australia**
14% Shiraz, 3% Viognier. Fresh and floral with black and red cherries, showing some finesse and freshness on the nose. Rich and lush, but with a lot of fruit. Fresh and delicious in the mid-palate, with fine tannins but plenty of fresh, thrilling salty with some iodine, and a lot of lovely exoticism. 95/100

**Torbreck Running 2010 Barossa, Australia**
14% Shiraz, 3% Viognier. Fresh and floral with black and red cherries, showing some finesse and freshness on the nose. Rich and lush, but with a lot of fruit. Fresh and delicious in the mid-palate, with fine tannins but plenty of fresh, thrilling salty with some iodine, and a lot of lovely exoticism. 95/100

**Torbreck The Footner 2017 Barossa, Australia**
15% alcohol. This is from Footer's Folly, a vineyard planted with Shiraz in 1900. A spicy shade grass or rose barrels from Dominique Lavaud, known as 'cage cuvée'. This is oaked with ripe black cherry and blackberry fruit, showing some floral and spice notes, and a touch of liquorice. Rich, ripe and lush, but with a touch of savoury salt. The salt is balancing all the sweetness, but this may well oxidise well over time. 97/100

**Torbreck The Laird 2021 Barossa, Australia**
15.5% alcohol. This is from the Greenock Greenock vineyard, planted with Shiraz in 1938. A spicy shade grass or rose barrels from Dominique Lavaud, known as 'cage cuvée'. This is oaked with ripe black cherry and blackberry fruit, showing some floral and spice notes, and a touch of liquorice. Rich, ripe and lush, but with a touch of savoury salt. The salt is balancing all the sweetness, but this may well oxidise well over time. 97/100

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