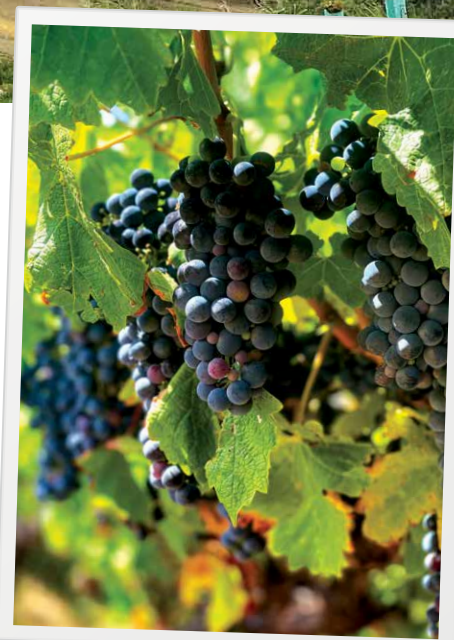
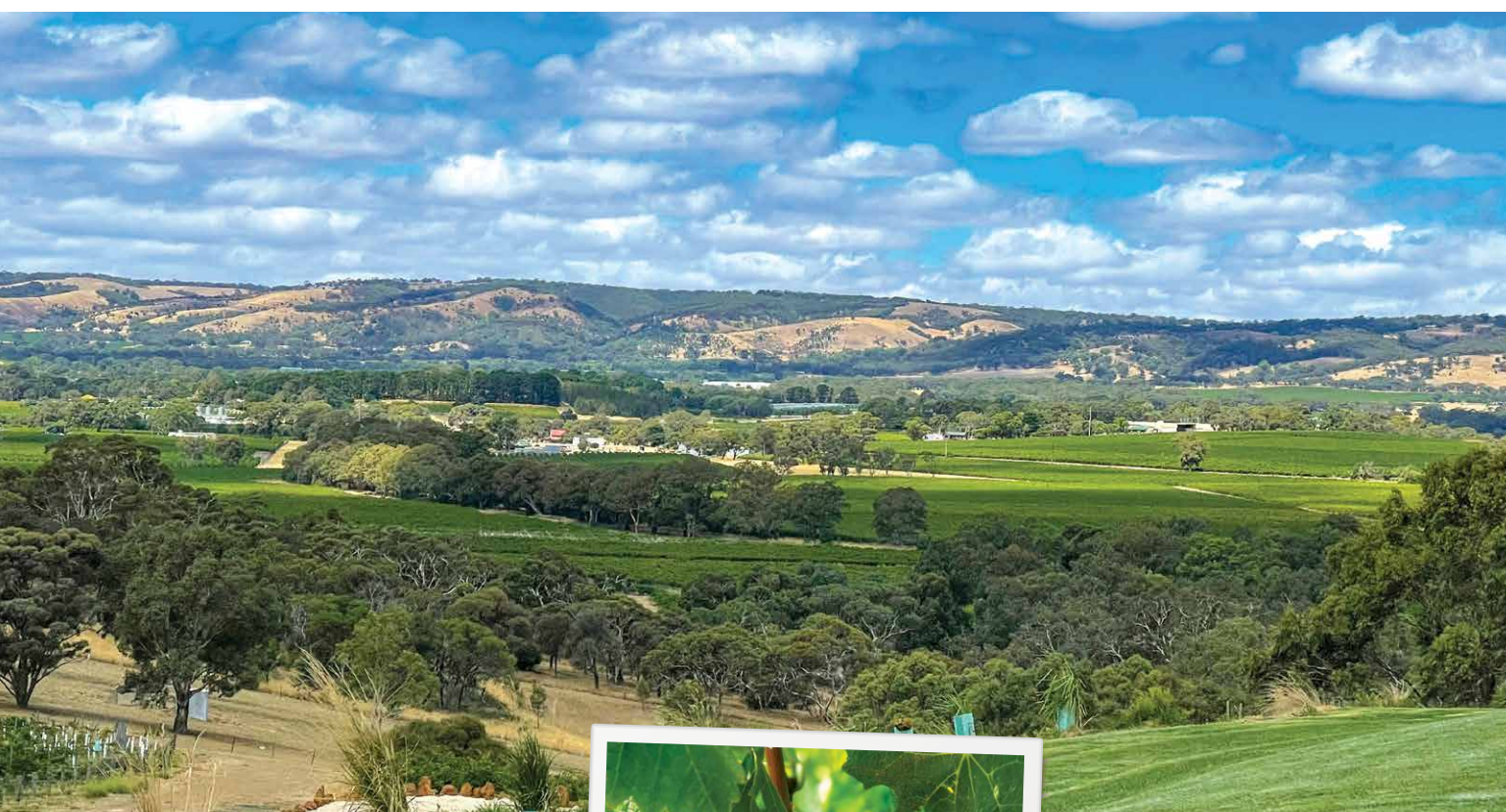


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# WINTER IS COMING

*Foggy mornings and the smell of wood fireplaces around the neighborhood when I take my dog for an evening walk. That's right, winter is coming. With that comes the desire for hearty slow cooked casserole and a big glass of warming red wine.*



**TOP TO BOTTOM:** The grapes for 'big red' wines are often grown in warmer climates; Intense flavours are a marker of these wines

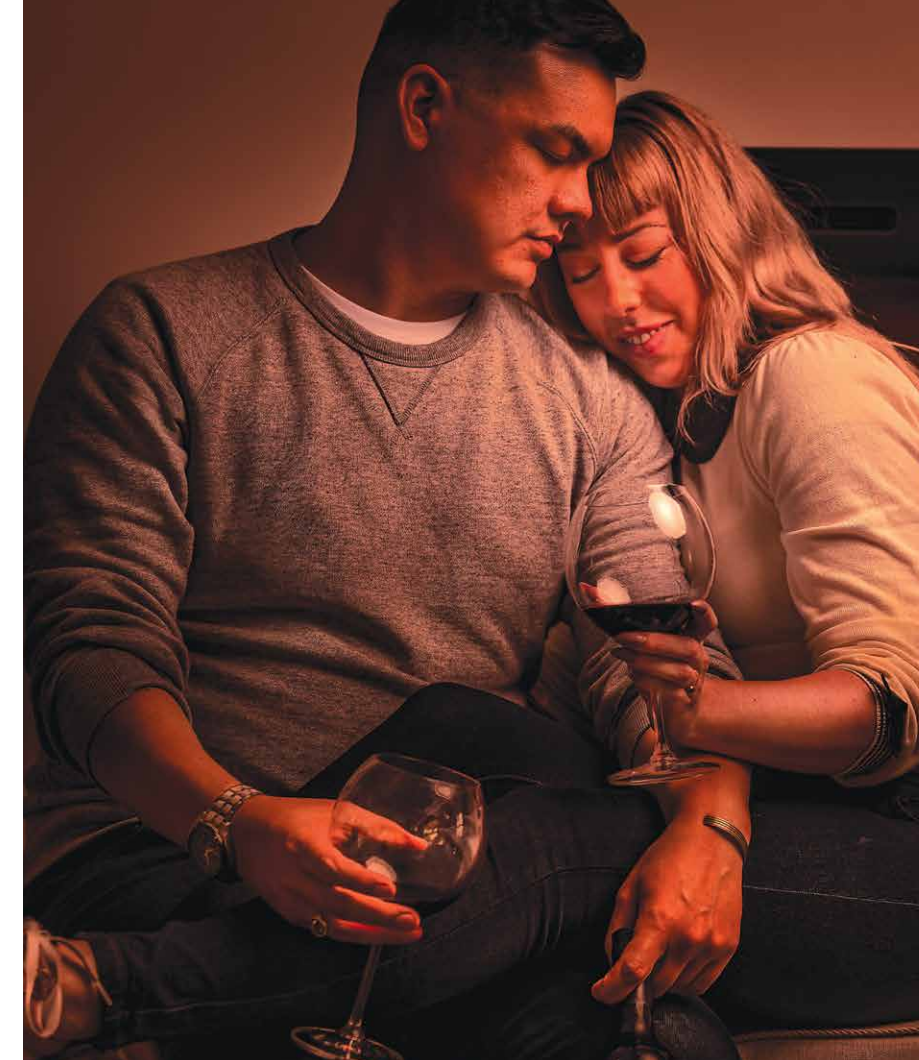
**W**e all know the feeling. The early morning chills are starting to set in. You see the trees turn red and yellow and slowly lose their leaves, as you dig out the slow cooker and put your favourite casserole on to cook. The warm smell fills up the house and you rug up by the fireplace with a glass of your favourite red. The wind and rain are causing havoc outside, but it doesn't bother you. You're in your happy place.

## WINTER DREAMING

This is how I would like to spend my cold winter evenings every year. How often do I actually get to do it? Not that often, but a girl can dream. So let me transport you into a place of slowly sipping peppery flavoursome goodness from a goblet, while we talk big winter reds.

Big reds – we've all heard the expression, but what does it actually mean and what is so big about those wines? Let me start unpacking this by saying a 'big red' normally implies a variety of intense bold flavours stemming from very ripe grapes. In fact, these flavours are often so intense they need to be balanced by introducing oak.

To achieve the level of ripeness required for a big red, grapes are generally grown in a hot climate. Think Barossa, Heathcote, Coonawarra, McLaren Vale, Hunter or Margaret River. These regions generally don't get a break from the heat and enjoy a multitude of very hot days and hot nights. This means the grape ripening continues around the clock, intensifying juicy flavours of the fruit and producing a lot of sugar. High sugar levels in the grapes in turn mean high alcohol levels in the wines – hence the warming sensation as you take a sip from your glass.



## PICKING THE RIGHT CANDIDATES

Not every grape variety can handle these extreme heat conditions without skin burst or spoilage, so when talking big reds I would predominantly focus on varieties such as Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Durif and Nebbiolo. They are all known for well-expressed ripe fruit characters, which often need to be balanced in the wine production process. There are two main techniques used to balance the big reds – skin maceration and, of course, oak.

Extended skin maceration is a technique of leaving the skins floating on top of the fermentation tank even after the fermentation is finished. This allows more tannins to leach into the wine producing, optimising the colour and flavour profile. Once the skins are removed, the wine is generally transferred into barrels for ageing, and here is where there's endless opportunities for experimenting, depending on the desired result.

Then, there's two types of oak used in wine production globally – French oak and American oak. French oak is generally known for its subtle and soft characteristics, while its American counterpart gives a lot more punch. This makes the latter a good wrestling companion for the powerful characteristics of the big reds in the flavour profile dominance game.

Another thing to consider is the age of oak – the older the barrel, the less intensity

it is going to give, so in production of big reds, mostly new oak barrels are used. From here the wine stays in barrels to soak up the flavours for anywhere between 6 months and a few years.

## FOR THE CELLAR

Have you ever heard the big reds last longer in the cellar and wondered why? Well, it's simple. You just have to think of ageing as a slow process of oxidation. Once the oxidation is done, the wine has turned into vinegar and is no longer drinkable. If you catch it mid-process, however, you might just enjoy the best of all worlds – the soft hugging characteristics of aged tannins balanced with well exposed secondary characteristics of the fruit.

With different wines that perfect 'in between' point happens at different times, and this is what we call the best drinking age. The more complex the wine, meaning the more elements there are in terms of primary and secondary fruit characteristics, tannins and sugar levels, the longer the oxidation process will take. This in turn prolongs the shelf life of the wine, extending its perfect drinking age. It is not uncommon for the big reds to last well over 20 years in a cellar, due to the complexity levels in the product, so if you have the patience they are definitely worth the wait! 🍷

## UP TO TASTE!

### HEATHCOTE RED EDGE DEGREE SHIRAZ 2017 – \$22

Shiraz is one of the most popular pairing candidates for a hearty winter meal pairing and is often a crowd favourite. This Heathcote shiraz is fairly young, which is visible in its deep purple-red colour. There are a lot of primary fruit characters on the nose, with dominant fresh plums, followed by dried herbs and dark chocolate.

These grapes are dry grown and therefore provide great intensity and balance on the palate, gentle but persistent tannin structure, flavoursome red fruit silky finish. Pair it with a slow-cooked shredded goat ragu pasta for the win!

### MARGARET RIVER FRASER GALLOP CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2018 – \$33

What a great mix of aromas! Think blueberry and cream danish pastry, dry bay leaf, and cassis to finish. On the palate, black fruit flavours set the scene, then the nutty and earthy mid palate progresses into soft rounded and long finish – a result of longer fermentation. For a perfect food pairing, try beef, rice, and herbs stuffed peppers.

### BAROSSA VALLEY KAESLER DURIF 2016 – \$35

When it comes to colour, durif is as vibrant as they get. This is a perfect fireplace companion with the nose of cold meats platter enjoyed by the red wood fire.

And the palate – have I mentioned fruit? Blue fruit, black fruit, plums, and especially blueberries, and only after that comes the balancing act – grippy tannins and a spicy finish. Have it with barbeque pork ribs to lighten up your day!

### MCLAREN VALE CHALK HILL NEBBIOLO 2018 – \$30

They say it's not a Nebbiolo if it doesn't bite you back when you drink it. Don't be spooked, this one is gentle – sort of. Roses and tar on the nose give a perfect introduction to this wine, developing into delicate aromas of velvet, cherries and leather. On the palate you will not escape the grip of this wine's fine tannin structure, so just give in and enjoy. While you're at it, see if you can taste some sour cherries, herbs and those rose petals you picked up at the start.

Pair it with prosciutto and basil pizza, which will restore the balance of your slightly rattled taste buds.