

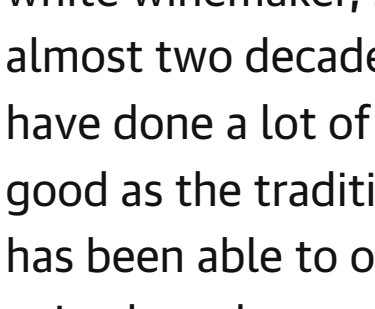
De Bortoli: Going green

Behind the label: the making of a sustainable and vegan wine

Winemakers John Coughlan and Roberto Delgado talk peas and potatoes - no, really - and the craft of making sustainably produced vegan wine.

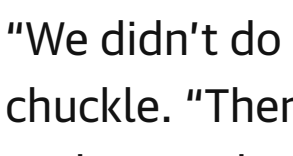
This holistic approach to sustainability also has a direct effect on the wine quality. Photograph: Owen Franken/Getty Images

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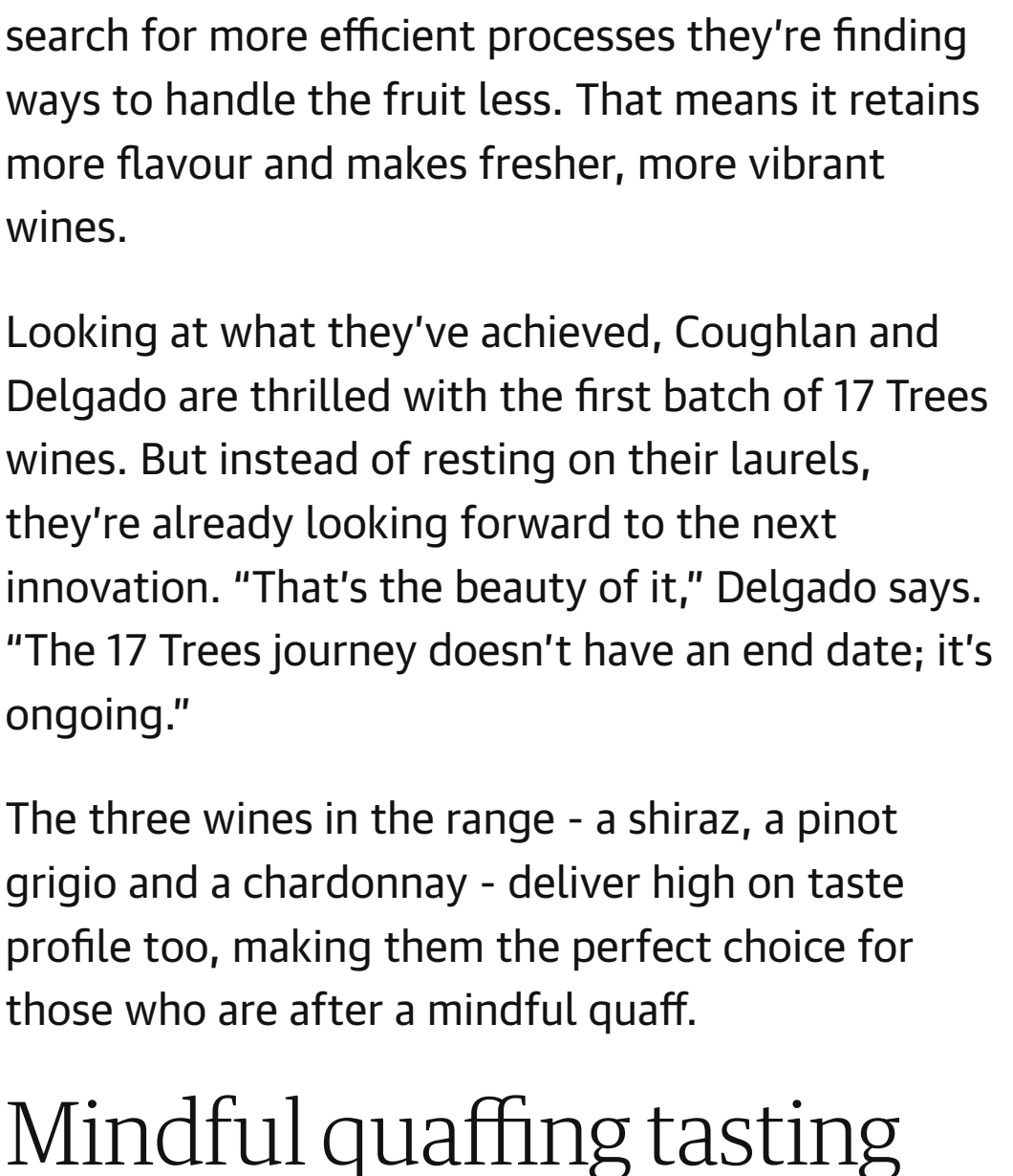
Most drinkers are used to wine with a hint of cherry, nectarine or even lychee. But pea and potato? Welcome the world of vegan wine. Fortunately, these humble vegetables aren't being added for their earthy flavours. Instead, pea and potato proteins are replacing a range of animal products historically used to clarify wines. They're the reason De Bortoli has been able to release a range of vegan wines under the [17 Trees label](#), and soon every De Bortoli product will be using them.

"When I first started, the vegetable-based fining agents weren't that great," says De Bortoli's senior white winemaker, John Coughlan. But that was almost two decades ago. Since then, "the suppliers have done a lot of R&D to get them to be just as good as the traditional ones". As a result, Coughlan has been able to oversee the transition away from animal products across De Bortoli's entire range of whites.

"We didn't do it overnight," he says with a wry chuckle. "There was a lot of trial and error and it took a good seven to eight years to become comfortable with the vegetable-based fining agents." But thanks to the new ingredients he's now able to produce better quality wines with less effort than ever.

It helps that the move away from animal products has been accompanied by a philosophy of making low-input wine. That begins with carefully considering how the grapes are grown.

De Bortoli's red and fortified winemaker, Roberto Delgado, says: "You certainly cannot grow every variety in every region around the world. So we're growing these varieties in the correct regions." For the 17 Trees range that means warm, dry vineyards requiring minimal spraying and grapes that can thrive in that climate without intensive irrigation.



When Delgado proudly proclaims "we're not fighting the elements - we're working with the environment", he means it literally. For every half-dozen 17 Trees wines sold, the label plants a tree. At the other end of the production cycle, a recycling program helps to reduce the need for new barrels.

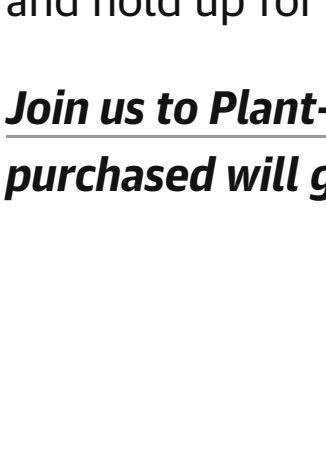
Coughlan says: "Because we're not buying new oak we're not having to cut down new trees. And I'm really happy with how those barrels are standing up. I'm going to keep using them in the pinot grigio program until they literally fall apart."

This holistic approach to sustainability also has a direct effect on the wine quality. As the winemakers search for more efficient processes they're finding ways to handle the fruit less. That means it retains more flavour and makes fresher, more vibrant wines.

Looking at what they've achieved, Coughlan and Delgado are thrilled with the first batch of 17 Trees wines. But instead of resting on their laurels, they're already looking forward to the next innovation. "That's the beauty of it," Delgado says. "The 17 Trees journey doesn't have an end date; it's ongoing."

The three wines in the range - a shiraz, a pinot grigio and a chardonnay - deliver high on taste profile too, making them the perfect choice for those who are after a mindful quaff.

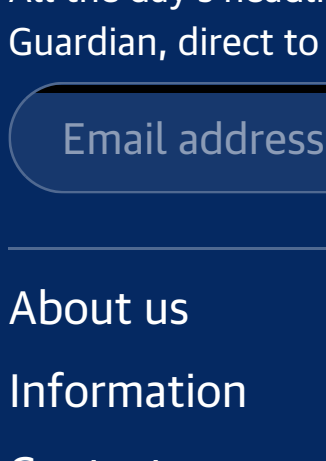
Mindful quaffing tasting notes



17 Trees 2019 Shiraz. Heathcote's free-flowing red Cambrian soils help to concentrate flavour in the fruit, and this intensifies further over the sunny days and cool nights

of the growing season. A rich wine with a gorgeous crimson colour, this shiraz has a palate of vibrant dark fruits, including plum and cherry, and a gentle mocha finish, tied together with a lick of oak.

Serve at: 18-20C
Pair with: a hearty dish such as an eggplant curry or mushroom risotto.
Storage: made to be consumed now, but will cellar nicely for four to five years.



17 Trees 2020 Pinot Grigio. Pinot grigio's tight bunches are well suited to the warm, dry plains of the Riverina and a dry vintage this year meant low yields but exceptionally high quality fruit. A

very pale example of pinot grigio, this wine is fresh and juicy, with mild acidity. The tropical perfume of lychees is joined by a slight citrusy zing thanks to a splash of King Valley riesling.

Serve at: 12-15C.
Pair with: this light white sits wonderfully alongside a garden or fruit salad.
Storage: a fresh wine, this is best drunk young.



17 Trees 2019 Chardonnay. From the same Nericon patch as the pinot grigio, near De Bortoli's Bilbul winery, the chardonnay benefits from minimal handling - it was pressed straight to barrel and left to sit for 12 months. A modern take on the "sunshine in a bottle" style, this creamy wine has medium straw colour and a good depth of flavour. Expect white peach and nectarine with a hint of toasted nuts.

Serve at: 15C.
Pair with: a rich wine needs rich food. Think fatty fish and scallops, or for vegans, a moussaka or creamy pumpkin soup.
Storage: ready to drink now, but will slowly mature and hold up for five to six years.

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