

AUSTRALIA

A supplement to Harpers Wine & Spirit | October 2009 | www.harpers.co.uk



A supplement to
Harpers
Wine & Spirit
TRADES REVIEW



Songlines

Australia is at a turning point as it seeks to move on from its easy-going image of yesterday and celebrate its maturing legacy of fine and regionally distinct wines

After a break of almost four years from touring Australia's vineyards it was refreshing to return Down Under recently to catch up with the good and the great in Victoria.

Refreshing not just because winter in Victoria's high country is as chilly as any London winter's day, but also because there is a palpable sense of a reinvigorated and renewed direction in the Australian wine industry. And, in many ways, the wines of Victoria perfectly encapsulate the messages that are coming out of Australia today.

The cool of winter is a great time to taste, with wines poised and palate fresh. At cellar door after cellar door, I was met by elegant, fresh Chardonnays, perfumed, sensual Pinot Noirs, spicier, intense, yet finely structured, Shirazes, and finally, warmed by the raisiny rich fortified wines of Rutherglen.

Across regions and within, the wines spoke eloquently of climate, people and a sense of place, of terroir.

All this helped impress that Australia has been fine-tuning the way in which it presents itself to the world.

Within this renewed focus, much emphasis is being placed on the highest quality wines, on Australia's still evolving, but already

well defined, sense of regionality, with this year's Landmark Australia Tutorial and Regional Heroes campaign as highlights of this move.

It is precisely these themes that are examined in this supplement. Taking Victoria as a microcosm for Australia as a whole, we look at the quality of the fine wine offering, exploring both this and the maturity of Australia's regionality through blind tasting, round-table debate and interviews with leading winemakers from Victoria and across the diverse states.

Elsewhere, we canvass opinion-formers in both the UK on and off-trades and invite feedback from those involved in the Regional Heroes promotion, also assessing how our retail and restaurant environments compare with the innovative wine scene in Victoria.

This is topped off by interviews with wine critic James Halliday and Wine Australia's Lisa McGovern for good measure.

Like so many songlines coming together, this supplement aims to present a fresh insight into Australia, while conveying the excitement, passion and quality being delivered in the wines.

Andrew Catchpole, supplement editor



“

Across regions the wines spoke eloquently of climate, people and a sense of place, of terroir

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Harpers Wine & Spirit is available on annual subscription at the following rates

UK: £161.20

Europe: £246.02

ROW: £260.96

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RSAX-AGEX-KXSL

Harpers Wine & Spirit Trades Review

800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park

Sittingbourne ME9 8GU

**Harpers
Wine & Spirit**
TRADES REVIEW

Harpers Wine & Spirit is published fortnightly by William Reed Business Media, Broadfield Park, Crawley, West Sussex RH11 9RT

Internet: www.william-reed.co.uk

Telephone: 01293 613400

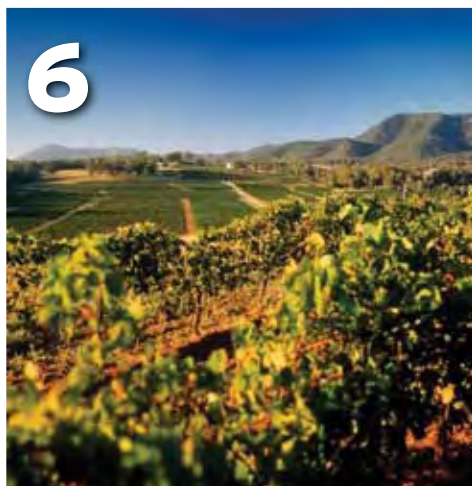
General Enquiries: 0800 6526514

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Cover image: Yarra Valley, Victoria.
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BUSINESS MEDIA



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Australia: a fresh perspective

Innovation, sustainability and terroir make for a vibrant mix, reports Andrew Catchpole, as he delves into the next chapter of the great Australian wine story

This year's Landmark Australia Tutorial marked a watershed in the world of wine. When, on June 1, 2009, a select, global group of opinion-formers embarked on a five-day journey across a spectrum of Australia's finest wines, few were fully prepared for just how intense and revealing an experience it would be. "It has been a fantastic, brilliantly received and almost flawlessly executed programme," blogged UK wine writer Jamie Goode on Landmark's final day. This event, groundbreaking in its scope, has clearly set the tone for Australia's way ahead.

The most significant aspect of Landmark Australia Tutorial is that it represented an unparalleled show of unity whereby an entire country's good and great came together to create a single platform for its diverse fine wine. Not only is it nigh on impossible to imagine such an event being convened by, say, France or Italy, but Landmark also gave the lie to the breadth of Australia's fine wine offering and regional diversity, especially when compared with rival New World-producing countries. And this is arguably why it marked such a pivotal point in Australia's ongoing evolution on the global stage.

Benchmarking Australia

Australia likes to think of itself, with some justification, as "The Great Innovator"; the country that has done most to engage

consumers with a consistent and varied supply of appealing, varietally labelled wines of quality across all price points and styles.

Recent events, though, have conspired to knock this enviable reputation. Over supply and a downward spiral of discounting have been compounded by recession, meaning that for the first time in decades Australia's remarkable rise in the UK has faltered.

The fallout has seen a vigorous regrouping of the industry in typically "can do" Australian fashion. Landmark simply represents the most high-profile point to date in a refocused, industry-backed generic marketing campaign aimed at raising the profile of Australia, with messages of quality, diversity and regional identity trickling down to the benefit of the

whole. It's a philosophy that underpins the recent launch of Australia's First Families of Wine, an independent, joint marketing initiative between 12 of Australia's longest-standing premium wine producers, including Tahbilk, Tyrrell's, Henschke and Yalumba.

"The fine wine strategy is exactly right," says Andrew Caillard MW, of Sydney-based fine wine Auctioneer Langton's. "We need to put our best foot forward in all markets, create informed debate and inspire support and interest in fine Australian wine, and regional identity is an important bass note."

Brian Croser, industry grandee and Tapanappa winemaker, agrees. "The ticket for entry to the global fine wine trade is getting used to the words 'fine wine' and 'terroir'



Brian Croser:
a pioneer in
Australian
terroir-driven
wines

Australia stats/facts

- Number one supplier to the UK off-trade
- Market share of 21% volume and 22% value
- Australia's average price per 75cl has risen from £4.36 to £4.46 in past year
- As a percentage of its total production, Australia sells more wine above £7 in the UK off-trade than any other country except France

(Source: Nielsen June 2009)

Landmark Australia Tutorial

The inaugural Landmark Australia Tutorial event saw 12 key opinion-formers from around the world descend on South Australia for a five-day series of masterclasses centred on tutorials and tastings of Australia's finest wines.

With the guidance of the country's leading winemakers and commentators, who had a free hand in selecting samples with which to benchmark Australia's myriad fine wine styles, the assembled attendees sampled their way through almost 250 wines in a series of tutorials that explored this diversity to the full.

Sessions ranged from the varietally focused, such as Riesling with Jeffrey Grosset and Shiraz with Stephen Pannell, to more broadly themed tutorials including Australia's Regional Classic

Wines with Michael Hill-Smith MW and An Historic Perspective with James Halliday and Andrew Caillard MW.

"I was impressed both by the quality and diversity of the 250 wines that formed the core syllabus," commented the UK's Julia Harding MW. "I certainly learned a lot more about the diversity and history of Australian wine in its many regional expressions ... and was delighted by the subtlety and distinctiveness of almost all the wines."

The second Landmark Australia Tutorial will take place on September 20-24, 2010, in the Yarra Valley, Victoria. Details on how to apply are available from wineaustralia.com/landmark with applications required by December 31, 2009.



as part of the universal lexicon and then promoting Australia's broad geographical advantages in the production of fine wine," he argues. "Such as the oldest geology and soils, cleanest atmosphere, proximity to the coldest ocean (Great Southern), tradition of fine wine production, best research into what makes our terroirs tick and commitment to producing the best wine regardless of cost."

Regional identity and education

It's a message that the overwhelming majority of the Australian industry has taken on board, sparking a plethora of initiatives in key markets such as the UK. The Regional Heroes campaign remains a core platform, linking aspects of fine wine, often cooler-climate areas and diversity through a focus on a key variety or wine style in 20 of the most prominent of the 62 regional GIs (see We can be heroes, page 22).

Education also lies at the heart of Wine Australia's many other ambitious

programmes, with aspects designed to give equal billing to both fine and mainstream wines.

The Regional Heroes campaign is soon to be repeated, as are further Landmark Australia Tutorial events, while regional distributors, training organisations and leading hospitality colleges can benefit from one-day training courses in six UK regions. Elsewhere, activities range from fine-dining events for consumers to trade-focused activities and a further round of tastings, seminars, events and trips aimed at both trade and press. Furthermore, Wine Australia is a partner in a global WSET education programme and is working with the association of Wine Educators to host 25 tastings across the UK in 2010. All these activities are underscored by Australia: world class, comprising an online education platform (wineaustralia.com/worldclass or on DVD) covering the making, marketing and enjoyment of Australian wine.

One challenge is that around 75%-80% of

Australia's production is in the hands of a few big companies such as Constellation, Foster's, Pernod Ricard and Australian Vintage, with much of the remainder split between 2,600 small to medium-sized producers. And, as winemaking consultant Tony Jordan pithily puts it: "While fine wine accounts for 15% of production, roughly in line with countries like France, Australia's credibility suffers in a way that France's doesn't if Australia does something unwise at the bottom end."

Long-term future

This hits hard at the core of Australia's recent image troubles on the back of the heavily discounted entry-level offerings in the multiples. What has become increasingly apparent, though, is that the major players are looking at ways of repositioning their core entry-level brands at more premium price levels through a mixture of economic necessity with a view to building a profitable long-term future for Australia's industry.

"The volume side of the business is not going to disappear," says Paul Henry, general manager for market development at the Australian Wine & Brandy Corporation. "But the reality is that other countries and regions can make wine more cheaply than we can and at AUS\$1.30 a litre there is little to be made, with no money at all at AUS\$1, so the level at which we are trading has to change."

Much has been made of the supposed gap between the small-volume finer wine fraternity and the big-branded volume players. But a key point to remember is that the bigger brands have been instrumental in offering both consistently good quality inter-regionally blended brands (now positioned ▶



Andrew Caillard
MW, director of
Langton's

Top 10 varieties planted (hectares)

• Shiraz	43,977
• Chardonnay	31,564
• Cabernet Sauvignon	27,553
• Merlot	10,764
• Semillon	6,716
• Other red	5,121
• Pinot Noir	4,490
• Other white	4,458
• Riesling	4,400
• Pinot Gris	2,835

(Source: AWBC 2008)

as Brand Champions), along with progressive tiers of quality that culminate in wines such as Penfolds' Grange and Hardys' Eileen Hardy.

In addition, separate brand tiers, such as Penfolds' Thomas Hyland wines and Hardys' Oomoo label, embrace regionality within these portfolios.

Pernod Ricard, meanwhile, owner of Jacob's Creek, has also embraced the spirit of this premium-range architecture, most recently with the Jacob's Creek Three Vines range – wines that draw on cooler-climate fruit with the aim of expressing character more in line with “the savoury flavours of southern Europe”. And, at the top end, the Johann Shiraz Cabernet has been showered with trophies and Halliday points, with fine-wine pricing to match.

Clearly the big players can – and do – contribute across the board, meaning that Australia's quality of offering is well fleshed out across a broad range of price levels. As UK agent David Gleave MW of Liberty Wines, rightly says: “Australia does this better than any country in the world and, at £6-£10 a bottle, can also offer quality and volume, which can be a problem with European wines.”

Squaring flexibility with regionality

It's a theme picked up by Paul Lapsley, group chief winemaker at Constellation. “It has been easy to pick holes in Brand Australia because of public perception at the bottom end but in terms of developing regionality, the past 10 to 20 years in Australia have been tremendously exciting and we are still

Australia's top 12 regions exported to the UK in 2008/2009*

- Barossa (includes Barossa Valley and Eden Valley)
- McLaren Vale
- Hunter Valley
- Riverina
- Limestone Coast
- Margaret River
- Clare Valley
- Langhorne Creek
- Adelaide Hills
- Coonawarra
- Yarra Valley
- Tasmania

* (Source: AWBC 2009)

* by GI label

discovering new regions,” he says. “We have a footprint in 34 regions in Australia and this is expressed in a range that begins with a broad regional character, say South Australia, and then goes right through to single region and single vineyard wines.”

Lapsley makes the point that within Constellation's portfolio it is possible to line up a horizontal tasting of 10 Chardonnays from 10 different GIs.

At the same time, the New World flexibility of being able to blend in cooler-climate fruit from regions as diverse as Adelaide Hills and Tasmania with more generous fruit from warmer climes, means greater complexity can be imparted to easy-drinking, everyday



Australia's top five export destinations by value, by country

- US (31%)
- UK (30%)
- Canada (9%)
- China (4%)
- New Zealand (3%)

(Source: AWBC MAT, June 2009)

wines. Lapsley argues that the two should not be mutually exclusive, suggesting instead that the big players have been instrumental in developing cooler-climate vineyards and regional sourcing.

Anthony Roberts, chief executive of Lion Nathan, which owns several regional wineries including Petaluma, Stonier and Mitchelton, agrees. “The multi-national companies are all making wines from Australia's leading regions that stand up to the best in the world,” he says.

“However, as an industry, our focus now needs to be back on premium regional wine and less on production-driven commercial brands. And now is the time for the much larger players to put their focus, investment and shoe leather into promoting their top wines – wines that give real excitement and engage the consumer with the category.”

Sustainability and the future

A big factor in all of this is environmental – namely climate change and the ongoing drought that has afflicted Australia for the past decade.

Not only has this squeezed producers in the volume-producing Murray-Darling Basin as water scarcity (and costs) have forced growers to consider the viability of their vines, but it has also encouraged the brand builders and blenders to increasingly look to the growing acreage of cooler-climate sites to source fruit. This means typically more expensive fruit – and more expensive wines – so this perhaps becomes a self-fulfilling step towards necessary premium positioning in the market.

“We are looking at sensible sustainability,” says Sean Shortt, sales and marketing director at Wingara Wine. “This means considering the



Australia is able to deliver across all price points



Australia's 2009 trophy achievements

International Wine Challenge

Great Value Champion White Wine

Tim Adams Clare Valley Riesling 2008

White Winemaker of the Year

Neil McGuigan – Australian Vintage

Lifetime Achievement Award

Peter Lehmann



soil, water and air, and achieving a sustainable balance, which also means we cannot chase prices impossible to achieve financially.”

On the thorny issue of over supply, a major factor underpinning Australia's extended forays into barely profitable discount-driven volume territory, many commentators, including James Halliday and Brian Croser, suggest that the situation should rectify itself within three to four years, arguably delivering further upward impetus to the industry.

Meanwhile, much of Australia's recent viticultural focus combines a deeper understanding of vine compatibility with climate and soils.

These vineyards are reaching greater maturity, imparting further character and complexity to the wines. And, as the word “terroir” springs ever more readily from winemakers lips, concern over how best to conserve this precious element is being translated into the aforementioned sustainable viticulture. In fact, this is an area where Australia increasingly leads the world.

Paul Henry

For Australian wineries to achieve sustainable and profitable growth, they must continue to establish competitive advantages on the global stage. The challenge for the Australian category is to defend its mainstream appeal in mature markets such as the UK, through better consumer engagement and more astute category management, while at the same time giving appropriate “voice” to its fine wines through trade education, channel-specific programmes and a targeted series of media messages around fine wine and regionality.

Wine Australia's strategy addresses commercial opportunity for both mainstream (Brand Champions/ Generation Next) and fine wines (Regional Heroes/Landmark Australia Tutorial). The weighting of these activities is typically driven by the maturity or otherwise of the local market, with mainstream activities aiming to encourage new consumer creation and greater awareness of Australian wine, and fine wine engagement adding detail and interest for higher involved consumers and specialist trade and media. These approaches are not entirely discrete, as significant momentum will continue to be driven by mainstream brands and, similarly, the absence of any fine wine activity is likely to adversely effect long-term positioning. As with



winemaking, the ideal composition is all about balance!

Australia will continue to evolve its category story, and look to engage and re-engage UK wine drinkers with points of difference and relevance. How can Australia differentiate itself? What you will discover in this supplement is a dynamic Australian category that has the wines (Brand Champions); the approach (Generation Next); the stories (Regional Heroes) and the inspiration (Landmark Australia Tutorial) to lead any market.

**General manager
market development
Australian Wine & Brandy Corporation**

“ We are looking at sensible sustainability, considering the soil, water and air. It means we cannot chase prices impossible to achieve financially ”

Projects to conserve water usage and reduce or eradicate the need to irrigate vines are widespread. Organic and biodynamic practices (which can help conserve water in the soil) are growing fast.

Prime examples range from Cullen in Western Australia, which became Australia's first carbon- neutral winery (currently organic, working towards biodynamic), to fully biodynamic wineries such as Curly Flat and Lethbridge in Victoria where the doctrine is widely popular. Meanwhile,

larger companies such as Yalumba, which became the first wine company in the world to receive the Climate Protection Award from the US Environmental Agency, adhere to strict policies of sustainability, operating in as an environmentally and socially sustainable way as possible.

The upshot is an industry that has lost none of its innovative quality. In fact, it remains at the forefront of the world in terms of exploring, experimenting, developing, fine tuning and driving forward its wine industry.

What has changed, though, is that from now on the emphasis has returned to those high-quality, regionally distinct, fine and fabulous wines Australia has been producing throughout. With a modest 2,600 producers spread across the entirety of this country, it's worth dwelling on the fact that a spectacularly high proportion of these winemakers concentrate on making fine wine. And it's with these wines, in all their terroir-rooted regional diversity, that Australia will continue to woo the world. ■

Lisa McGovern

The director of Wine Australia for the UK, Ireland and Europe discusses the state of the industry Down Under with **Andrew Catchpole**

After a few months at the Wine Australia helm, are the challenges facing Australia as you first perceived them?

“The challenges for Australia are well documented, and I don’t think they have changed significantly in the past six months. There is a greater pressure on exporters, given the strengthening of the Australian dollar, but, however frustrating, this is an external variant not within the control of the industry.

“Having spent time in Australia, I am very positive in terms of the direction the industry is taking. Talk, for example, to the producers about Chardonnay, and you see evolution – lower levels of oak, less malolactic fermentation and people looking for leaner yet more expressive styles. I find this really exciting.”

What is the current mood among Australian producers?

“I think there is a lot of positivity and energy in the industry. If there is one thing about Australians, they are very committed; they look for answers and solutions. Innovation is being driven across the industry, from lightweight packaging and new size formats to wines with lower alcohol, and there is a growing understanding of variety and site selection, and the emergence of new varieties like Vermentino.”

After running so fast, so well, for so long, how well is Australia adapting to slowing down and gaining greater maturity?

“There is a growing maturity and there is an understanding that perhaps we don’t need to be all things to all people, offer-

ing every variety. There is a focus emerging in regions, as with Pinot Noir from the Mornington Peninsula, when a variety does so well that it becomes more or less synonymous with the region, and this highlights the importance of regional education.

“At the same time there will always be innovation because there are few restrictions. There is still that wonderful sense of experimentation, and I believe there is opportunity in Australia for specialists and generalists.”

Has it been difficult selling the concept of one region, one variety, back into the Australian industry?

“I think many people are behind a focused message that communicates and promotes regionally distinct and fine wines.

“We have focused our marketing efforts on creating awareness and using the most established regions with distinct styles as the leading examples. The Regional Heroes programme takes 15 regions and their recognised one or two varieties. We have to have a way of emphasising the quality that is coming out of a given region and communicating that. We are not saying ‘this region only makes this variety’, rather ‘this is a flagship variety from this region.’”

“**Innovation is being driven across the industry, from lightweight packaging to wines with lower alcohol**



So, in essence, you are aiming to change the perception of a country that has been building from the bottom up to one where a message of high-end quality trickles down?

“It’s more about extending the positioning. Our Brand Champions and mainstream wines offer a great entry point, but we need to highlight the depth of the portfolio, and drive awareness of quality. This is happening with the initiation of the Landmark Australia Tutorial and further fine wine initiatives will build on this. Demonstrating our success in international awards is also critical where quality is being recognised across the category.”

How does this square with the bigger-volume brands?

“I think that a message around quality is beneficial for the whole category, and there are regional and fine wines in the portfolios of some of our largest producers.

“However, we need to make sure we continue to be relevant

in a mainstream environment and are highlighting wines that offer great value for money and are readily accessible on the high street. We have a number of initiatives around sampling and education that will focus on our Brand Champions and Generation Next this year. We need to highlight the advancement in styles and varieties and engage new consumers.”

How would you sum up Australia?

“Australia offers a wealth and richness of wines sourced from over 60 regions covering a varied and diverse topography – dynamic and innovative, with dedicated viticulturalists, winemakers, researchers and marketers.

“The industry has shaped modern wine drinking and will continue to enthuse and engage wine drinkers and connoisseurs for many years to come.”

Lisa McGovern is director, UK, Ireland and Europe, Wine Australia

What can Australia do for you?

We ask key figures across the trade what they would most like to see Australia do now to help them maintain, if not grow, their Australian wine sales. **Richard Siddle** reports

If you counted the number of column inches predicting nothing but doom and gloom for wine from Down Under, you might be surprised to see Australia still proudly topping the list of bestselling wine producing countries in the UK.

Australia remains one of the most

important wine categories with buyers and importers across the UK wine sector. But Australian producers are also only too aware there are concerns and issues to be addressed. We asked some of the key UK wine buyers what they would like to see from the Australian wine sector. ▶

Pierpaolo Petrassi

"Australia is still performing very well and is one of Tesco's strongest country categories. We are seeing increasing success with more subtle, elegant, drinkable styles in both reds (Pinot Noir, Shiraz/Viognier, cooler climate Merlot and Cabernet) and whites (Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling). That said, the old favourites within Tesco label and branded ranges are still performing well.

"Australia is now better set up to produce cooler climate, more premium offerings given the climatic challenges of the warmer inland-irrigated regions. But the consumer has not moved so quickly to embrace this. There is still a lot of demand for the mass-market offering, which Australia isn't developing as much.

"We should not get sucked into the idea Australia is failing. Most countries would trade places with its success and consumer-appeal in a heartbeat. All countries go through phases of realignment of production versus demand.

"If Australia is seeking to maintain or grow its market position, it will need to continue with the current balance of EDLP prices with a good promotional offering and new, interesting wines.

"Wine Australia has a challenging task to juggle the often juxtaposed demands of producers, press, importers and consumers. In my view, it does as good a job as any generic body out there.



"Regionality has to be one element of a much broader mix. Australia needs to satisfy the demands of consumers across the price spectrum. It makes sense to educate those higher-involvement consumers who want to learn more about regionality, but those who don't should not be forgotten as they will simply look to other countries. Regionality should perhaps be seen as a natural progression for the premium part of the market for a country category reaching a more mature stage in its UK development.

"If there is one thing which cannot be faulted, it's Australia's positioning, with its unique ability to appeal to every strata of UK consumer. I think the work on proving longevity for the best Australian wines will continue to enhance their quality credentials and this will bathe reflected light upon all Australian wine."

**Senior product development manager
Tesco**

Martin Lam

"We list a substantial amount of Australian wine. We do our wine list by varietals or stylistically - never geographically. But are then very specific in the note about where the wine is from.

"The stress on regionality is appropriate from a technical point of view, but we do not want to submit our customers to a geography test before they choose their wine. It is a big ask for a customer to think region, then style, then producer, then price point.

"The work being done on regionality is absolutely correct, but they may be fooling themselves if they think it is progressing as far as the consumer. Australia has first to get the trade back into Australia and it is essential it gets that knowledge about regionality out to the trade. We can then lead people to regional Australian wine.

"A new generation of winemakers is emerging. Victoria and the Yarra Valley just gets better and better and Tasmania continues to plough its individual furrow. I am also more convinced by winemakers who make consistently good lower-alcohol wines."

Owner

Ransome's Dock, Battersea, London





A new generation of winemakers is emerging

Tony Allen

"We are doing very well with overall volumes, although there has been an amount of down-trading. Sales are very buoyant for entry and mid-level wines and quite sluggish for premium wines. At mid-level we favour hand-made wines that are not overtly oaky, too alcoholic or lacking in structure and balance.



"The key issue with Australian wine is the way it is now perceived by many drinkers and people within the wine trade as being overtly fruity, sweet and oaky. Australian wine is often pigeon-holed as a result of several years of heavy discounting by multiple grocers. Many mid and premium wines are being ignored due to preconceptions when, in fact, many wineries are producing wines with more elegance, structure and complexity and less alcohol. I would like to see this image of Australian wine being addressed.

"Low-level entry-level wines will always be produced, but they should not be the focus of a generic body. To counteract any prejudices and negativity, more focus should be given to regionality and the new generation of food-friendly wines. If a producer has changed his wine style for a reason he needs to shout about it. If a large number of wineries are producing wines that are more elegant, lighter and refined, and less oaky, extracted and alcoholic, then they need to let the world know.

"There should be more investment in the on-trade via POS, education and promotion.

"Regionality is extremely important, but it won't be easy to communicate to the UK consumer. It will only work when communicated in conjunction with grape varieties and styles. It won't work if the message is too complex as most consumers will be too unwilling to learn. I think Margaret River and Tasmania have the best chance of succeeding."

**Purchasing manager
Matthew Clark, Australia**

Robin Naylor

"Of all the countries affected by recession, the take-up of Australian wines over £8 retail and £20 on a restaurant list has been hardest hit. With the Australian dollar moving from \$2.30/£1 in January to \$1.89 and falling, it is increasingly hard to source the cheaper wines necessary to deliver the required values. So it's hard to sell and hard to buy.

"We are not being offered fantastic deals by producers who prefer to ride out the storm with lower volume sales but consistent pricing and 'brand' management.

"I'd like to see producers being more proactive in the UK, with smaller parcels of more interesting wine, such as well-priced regional wines and varieties. That would at least excite the market.

"There is no need for Australia to lose its bulk and volume sales, but it needs to



market itself for more premium and mid-priced wines much more effectively.

"The next 18 months are going to be tough for Australia in the UK. There is little perceptible evidence that Australia is doing much to counter this in terms of innovation or price."

**New World buyer
Boutinot**

Hamish Anderson

"Australia is an important part of our sales in our restaurants. With the serious wine drinker, like we see at Tate Britain, we are selling more and more. The wines also deliver great value at between the £8-£15 buying points.

"I am not convinced about presenting Australian wines regionally on a wine list.

"The first thing people look for is grape variety. They say they want a Cabernet Sauvignon, not a Margaret River wine. But you can do a lot with the descriptions on the list. I am a big believer in that. You can look at Shiraz, then talk about cool climate Shirazes from Australia.

"When I started 12 years ago, Australian wine was new and exciting. Wine is a subject of fashion, so in a way it

is a victim of its own success.

"But it makes such a big difference having been there. Sommeliers can do that in Europe but it is a lot harder to go to Australia.

"More of the younger producers need to come here, but a lot are more focused on their own market or selling to the US.

"We need access to the best wines, but it is not sustainable to be in the UK at certain price points."

**Head sommelier,
wine buyer
The Tate**





It is vital for Australia to continue to establish and promote its differing regional styles

Ben Stephenson

"Australia needs to focus on quality. There are too many poor examples of commercial wines, which devalues Brand Australia as a whole.



"We sell quite a lot of premium Australian wines at between £10 and £25 a bottle.

"I would like to see Wine Australia supporting more regional and local events - following the lead that Vini Portugal has started in actively promoting their wines on a local level around the country."

Managing director, Hanging Ditch Wine Merchants Manchester

Liz Long

"Australia has made its name by producing consistent branded wines at competitive price points. Any upward price movements will affect sales.

"Varietal labelling is popular and we are seeing interest in some of the more unusual varieties and blends.

"It is important that promotional budgets are not cut as competition from other New World countries is intense.

"It's way too early to talk about regionality. A lot of work is still ongoing in matching varieties to terroir.

"Marketing on this basis when the industry developments are happening so swiftly is premature and will only confuse customers.

"More work needs to be done internally in defining regional identity before Australia is ready to present a clear and coherent message to the outside world."



Wine consultant, Hanging Ditch Wine Merchants Manchester

Nathan Fynes

"It is vital for Australia to continue to establish and promote its differing regional styles. Areas such as Western Australia produce a signature style of wine consumers can identify with.

"This is not the case for most of Australia, with consumers often driven by brand then grape variety then region.

"A lot of time has been spent establishing the regional styles in New Zealand, but UK consumers have a basic understanding of New Zealand's geography, grape varieties and regional styles.

"Australia has built itself up on its brands and this hasn't done much to establish the credibility of Aussie winemaking in the long term.

"Australian winemakers and Brand



Australia need to work out what they do best and stick with it and stop trying to be everything to everyone."

Marketing manager, Hennings Wine Pulborough, West Sussex

Meeghan Murdoch

"People have not been asking for Australia as much recently. It's the Yellow Tail Syndrome - people got tired of low-priced, confected wines and over-oaked Chardonnay.

"But recently I brought in the Vasse Felix Heytesbury, selling at around £35 - this has gone over very well.

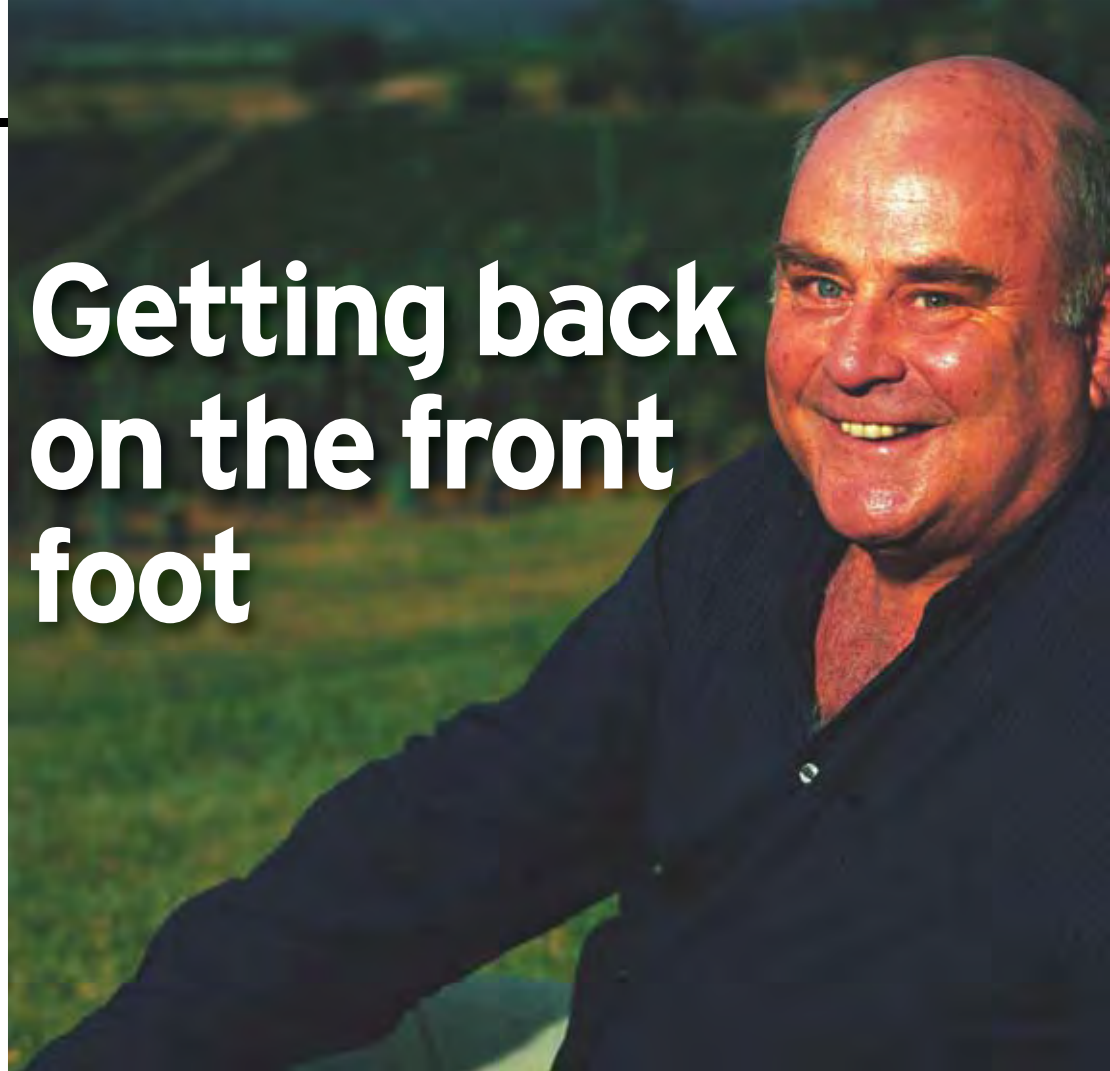
"I would like to see more experimentation with grape varieties and better marketing of different grape varieties - and a focus on quality rather than quantity."

Wine buyer, The Wine Circle Virginia Water, Surrey



Australia's leading wine critic, highly respected author and consultant winemaker James Halliday talks frankly to Andrew Catchpole about the current state of the industry and his vision for the future

Getting back on the front foot



Q: How much of a problem is oversupply in the Australian wine industry?

A: In 2008 the harvest was 1.5 million tonnes. Everyone agrees this was 300,000-400,000 tonnes more than is needed for an orderly market, so there is pressure, in various ways, to radically reduce the crush. But unlike beer or spirits, you can't just turn the tap off and on. If we take [the area under vine] down, we can't in a later year simply increase supply if demand in China or elsewhere really takes off. And it will, it's just a question of timing. Ditto India and the whole of Asia. Not necessarily during my lifetime but certainly during my children's. I think Asia is unarguably our biggest market for

the future. Look at Yabby Lake, which has just opened its third cellar door in China.

Q: How is the drought affecting the situation?

A: It's a real issue for Murray-Darling and there are competing needs for water resources with the cities and population increases. Little has been done to sustain our water resources and we can't predict how long the drought, now in its tenth year, will continue. All we can say is that the situation is pretty dire. The cost of water will go through the roof. So what are we going to do? Pour water on the vines, or assume a course of lower tonnage at higher costs? But will the quality of wine justify significantly higher pro-

duction costs in the Riverland? Murray fruit, with much lower yields, can achieve quality, but this [viticulture] is a form of hydroponics, if we reduce water and yields there is no guarantee that quality will repay the effort. It could significantly improve but you are never going to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

Q: Does this mean some volume production vineyards should be abandoned?

A: Murray-Darling, which provides the big base of wine production, shouldn't see its production decreased. Leave it and source as much as possible from cool-climate vines. Then, if we get further increases in the severity of drought, we will get a big loss of tonnage from Murray-Darling rather than cooler-climate grapes. But you need a crystal ball to know what will happen and the real problem is precisely this uncertainty.

Q: What does this mean for Brand Australia?

A: Australia, having had its cake, is now finding it can't eat it.

France has not been beaten for being brand France in the way Brand Australia has been because France has always been branded as regional. But both are like a pyramid, with volume at the base and smaller production, higher quality, regional wines at the top. English wine writers have been saying "Australia's time has passed, it's boring", but the public doesn't follow them. It's all about convincing the gatekeepers that Australia has an incredible range, spanning 63 GI's, across every conceivable climate. We simply have to convince the gatekeepers; we do have the resources in place and we do have great wines.

Q: What more needs to be done?

A: Look at what is happening. Foster's is selling vineyards, Constellation is withdrawing 1 million-plus cases from the UK market. They have been buying market share at a loss and now have decided to sell regional vineyards and wineries in Australia. Some of these sales have a buy-back component of grapes. Tim Adams just bought Leasingham, so there are very



Australian producers need to plan for long-term opportunities



James Halliday:
'Alternative varieties will stir up interest among younger drinkers'

mixed messages coming out of the big companies. In 1985, when Hazel Murphy started the Glass in Hand promotion, it worked, getting people to taste Australian wines for themselves.

Q: Do you think the big companies will contribute to this premium focus?

A: If you know, as I know, the winemakers for the big companies, it's obvious that they are driven, that they believe in their wines. And if the bean counters stick their heads into the cellars and say "we want you to cut corners", then they [the bean counters] would be eviscerated.

The big company winemakers and, similarly, the good smaller company winemakers are highly talented, very dedicated, but in Australia, unlike the US, we suffer from the tall poppy syndrome. A big dilemma for the larger companies is that there

is not a lot of money to spend on turning around public opinion in important markets such as the UK and US. So do they spend in these markets or spend in China and the rest of Asia where there is growth? I think that the big companies have to grasp the nettle and spend on their upper echelon brands, because here they can make a margin, unlike the three-for-£10 deals.

Q: So what are the key messages to communicate?

A: Look at Victoria. It has a wonderful palette of styles. The diversity is extraordinary. From Rutherglen there are unbelievable stickies, there is fantastic fizz from north Yarra, plus Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, along with cool-climate Shiraz from lower in the valley and from Central Victoria. Mornington is coming along with some great Pinot Noirs and then the potential of Gippsland and

Geelong are still being discovered. King Valley is a hotbed of varieties, and alternative varieties are good for stirring up interest among younger drinkers. We now have over 90 commercial varieties. There's plenty of Nebbiolo and Sangiovese, for example. Tempranillo, too, is a definite possibility for success in the future, there are also small amounts of varieties like Primitivo and Arneis, plus we have the rosé phenomenon here.

Q: So regionality must be the clear focus for the future?

A: There are some very good examples of inter-regional blending, such as Penfolds Bin 389, but very few top wines above AU\$20 are blended from more than one region so regionality already strongly exists in the better wines. ■

De Bortoli Wines, family owned and proudly Australian since 1928



De Bortoli's Yarra Valley Estate

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YARRA VALLEY
ESTATE GROWN

- Vignier
- Sauvignon
- Pinot Noir Rosé
- Chardonnay
- Shiraz Vignier
- Shiraz
- Cabernet Sauvignon
- Pinot Noir



It's no secret the most delicious flavours develop from the best quality ingredients and we think great wine is no exception. That's why we source premium grapes from the De Bortoli family estate for the Yarra Valley Estate Grown Wines. Selected sites and mature, low yielding vines deliver exceptional quality fruit to the winery where gentle, low intervention winemaking produces wines with varietal detail, but above all wines that are an expression of the vineyard.

www.debortoli.com.au



Andrew Pirie, Tasmania



“People didn’t understand the terroir of Tasmania at the beginning and we have still barely scraped the surface in terms of developed areas. As we see Tasmania developing, the point is not to plant vines everywhere, but to pick the best areas, identify the best terroirs, and certainly not go into over-production.

“One of the benefits of being in our industry is that it attracts people who will do back-flips to try and get it right. There are around 200 vineyards here and there is an extraordinary proliferation of small vineyards so the great thing is that sites get tested.

“We are starting to get pretty broad coverage of potential areas and are already up against the limits in terms of temperature and rainfall, and even some areas that, believe it or not, are too dry. There are seven sub-regions of Tasmania that are all starting to develop their own local value, but which all basically fit into a broader idea of Tasmania.

“There will be further strides forward, not least as clones are matched to terroirs and these new plantings reach greater maturity over the next few years. Then there is the research programme into cool climate viticulture, that Richard Smart is running out of Tamar Ridge, which is helping us further understand how to best work our vineyards. We have seen new Pinot vines, still only three to four years old, producing fruit that has gone straight up to reserve level, which shows quite how good quality can be when the combination of clone and site is understood and works well together.”

Pirie Estate and Tamar Ridge, Tasmania

Back to the grass roots

The winemakers behind Australia’s regional wines are as much a part of terroir as the climate and soils. With this in mind, we canvassed a round-up of pioneers, personalities and prominent producers for their opinions on regional identity

Amid much talk of terroir, and with 42% of Australia’s crush coming from the regional GIs, it’s becoming increasingly clear that this continent’s story is as diverse and regionally rooted as any wine-producing nation in the northern hemisphere. What is less clear, is how to convey this to a generation of consumers who have been brought up on sun-drenched images of a country that has excelled at producing generous, consistent and good-value inter-regional blends that delivered what they said on the can.

Fine Australian wines, whether from warmer regions such as Barossa, the maritime

environs of Margaret River or cool slopes in the Yarra Valley, have been with us for some time. But it’s fair to say their regional identity has generally been underplayed compared with hooks such as variety and producer in terms of helping consumers to understand the wines. With Australia’s ever-resourceful producers now pushing to rectify this, not least as regions both young and old continue to evolve and mature, we rounded up the opinions of some real Regional Heroes on the challenges and opportunities of creating and promoting regional identity for their GIs and their wines. ■

Philip Shaw, Orange

“I had been looking for a very cool area and had the freedom to choose where I wanted to go. There were only a couple of people in Orange before me (although I did recently discover that vines were growing here in the 1800s) but now a lot more people have arrived. It is difficult to say that there is one distinct Orange style because there is so much variation in the vineyards, which range between 600m and 900m or more, with different aspects and soils. There are some good, rich Chardonnays from lower down, while my vineyards at 900m make more elegant, restrained styles of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and there is some very good Sauvignon Blanc coming out of the vineyards at 1,000m. Riesling may also do well here.

“Cooler climates have been somewhat overlooked because most of the big



companies have been looking for fruit for medium-level wines and cooler-climate fruit is more expensive. There has also been an over-indulgence with big, alcoholic styles and, while some Australian regions are fairly warm, it still doesn’t mean that they can’t make some elegant wines. But there are huge areas where cooler climates

Vanya Cullen, Margaret River

"Establishing Margaret River was unusual for its day in that Dr John Gladstone's detailed study defined the region, suggesting it would most suit Bordeaux varieties.



At the time, it was the only place planted on a plan. Cabernet was the first variety to be established and it's still the strongest variety here, followed by Sauvignon and Semillon.

"The Cabernets won medals from the early days and the pioneers even established an appellation-type system. Although the label integrity programme supersedes this today, the old system was in ways stricter, saying no fruit from Busselton, for example, despite the fact that there wasn't really anything planted there then. Label integrity suggests that 85% minimum of fruit should come from Margaret River. As an organic and biodynamic producer, our fruit has to come 100% from our own vines.

"People are still experimenting with varieties and the future partly depends on the climate – but being by the cooling sea, we may not experience dramatic changes. Ultimately, the message is that if the wine isn't good quality from Margaret River then it won't sell."

Cullen Estate, Margaret River

can be found. These include Tasmania (some of which is too cold), southern South Australia, Adelaide Hills, Clare Valley, both coastal Victoria and its high country, parts of New South Wales (which are further south than Coonawarra), all of which fit cool-climate requirements.

"Australia has long been strongly regional, with a huge variety of styles, from elegant Rieslings of Clare to the lowish alcohol Semillons of Hunter. Australia has learned the lessons of following too narrow a path and while there is definitely room for accepted Australian styles, those inter-regional blends, Cabernet/Shiraz's, and powerful styles of wine, it is the cooler-climate, regionally distinct styles that will most appeal to the rest of the world."

Shaw Family Vineyards, Orange

Chester Osborn, McLaren Vale

"Our tie to McLaren Vale is important, but I also like making wines with Adelaide Hills fruit, so this is why we have a red stripe on the label for all of our McLaren Vale wines, to differentiate it from wines like the Stump Jump and others that are either blends or straight Adelaide Hills. Some wineries blend and lose the regional identity, but for us it is exciting to express the differences between McLaren and Adelaide fruit, or explain why these differences can work well in a blend.

"Australia has excelled at telling people what is in the bottle, which was good, so people knew what they were getting. The

next stage is that people want to know where the wine is from. The easy way is putting a map on the label, which we are working towards.

"Almost every Australian region has grown significantly in the past 10-20 years. There have been a lot of newcomers, but also a lot of wines based on price, though now, once again, McLaren is changing very quickly, with people pulling back from the extreme, from big oak, tannic extraction, very ripe fruit, and looking for much clearer definition, mineral character and individual identity."

D'Arenberg, McLaren Vale



Steve Webber, Yarra Valley

"You have to have a regional story and tell people about the philosophy of the region. Yarra has several strengths. It is very settled as a wonderful Chardonnay area with a distinct style of wine. And we are also well known for our perfumed Pinot Noir, though much less well known is the area's potential for great Syrah. We get finesse, elegance, minerality and good varietal character in the Yarra.

"In relation to cooler Victoria, Yarra is probably the biggest volume region so it is important that Yarra is well recognised, but also known as a producer with a lot of single vineyard and regional quality wines. It's not easy where we are to make larger volumes of finer wine but this finiteness is a good thing. There has long been this attitude in Australia that if we like it, we'll just make more of it, but it doesn't work. It's better to focus on quality and charge the appropriate price.

"We must put our best foot forward in tastings and always show our finest wines. If Yarra shows well I win anyway, whether my wines are showing or not. And this is true not just of Yarra but Australia as a whole. Wines are often shown through political correctness but bad



wines can screw up the whole message.

"That said, Australians have always been pretty good at working together and I think it is more important to work with like-minded rather than similar-sized producers. Which is why, when we do a tasting, we often show our wines alongside those from people like Luke Lambert, Timo Mayer, Bill Downie, Gary Mills and others. As a larger company we have the ability to help some of the smaller people. But they help us as people who believe in what they do and also make high-quality wines."

De Bortoli, Yarra Valley

Louisa Rose, Barossa

"In Australia most regions had most varieties planted in them which has been great for working out what works best. There has been a lot of experimentation and this has helped understanding of which varieties are perfectly suited to which region, and to sites within that region.

"Now there are strong identities, such as Riesling and Clare, Shiraz and Grenache in Barossa or sparkling wine, along with Pinot Noir and aromatic varieties, from Tasmania, and so on. So there has been a natural evolution through which the real Regional Heroes have come to the fore.

"We should ensure, though, that we retain the flexibility to be able to experiment so that wines with a difference, like our Viognier from the Eden Valley, can be made and stand alone on their merit. Also, if you look at the Barossa, we are only really beginning to understand the complexity it offers. The north and east produce wines that people would consider to be typical Barossa, but elsewhere in the valley, styles vary greatly from this popular image of the wines.

"We have the best of both worlds, with pre-phyllloxera Shiraz and Grenache in the Barossa, and Riesling plantings at Pewsey Vale in Eden going back to 1847, while we still have the flexibility to experiment and also make entry-level wines like Oxford Landing that are from South Australia, but still give insight into the styles from its regions."

Yalumba, Barossa



Bruce Tyrrell, Hunter Valley

"For an understanding of regionality you need to look at the best from Hunter, Margaret, Barossa, McLaren and elsewhere. Not in the £4 bracket, but from wines that are £8-£15 and above – wines I would say are already pretty well known and already accepted wine styles.

"The more expensive the wine gets, the smaller the market will be, but if you look at the upper part of the market, that is pretty much where all of the growth is. We need our good £4-£6 wines, but we also need to move higher up the scale, which is what our 2025 plan is all about; getting a good hold on that upper part of the market.

"There has been a lot of new planting in the past 20 years, with greater experience of sites and better selection of clones, and so we are now seeing a further lift in quality, especially with red wines, as a lot of these vines are now over 10 years old. Above all, we have got to get the consumer to understand that we have an incredible variety of styles,

that Australia is bigger than Europe and, in terms of diversity, it's almost worth thinking about our states as being like different countries.

"In terms of marketing, one region to one variety as a clear regional message is the way to go. Here in the Hunter we



Jeffrey Grosset, Clare Valley

"Clare's viticultural history may go back 150 years, but I was still something of a pioneer coming here 29 years ago. There was already Riesling here with a reasonable reputation, but it was reds, if you think of wines like Wendouree, that Clare was best known for. Perhaps arrogantly I thought the region had even greater potential for whites.

"Riesling is still not fashionable in broader terms, but the style that works well here and in Eden Valley is dry, so that is what has become established as an Australian style. The point is that with its refreshing style when young, its potential to age, its complex aromatic character, it is a great white variety and perhaps this is easier to understand for Australians who would be more used to drinking this variety with a meal.

"In terms of understanding the terroir, we have spent 29 years farming on two sub-regions that showed a lot of potential and now on two sites within those sub-regions. Polish Hill is a hard rock site, while Springvale is a soft rock site, but it's been enough to spend this time, this 29 years, just getting to know these sites well.

"Clare is seen as a pretty consistent, reasonably well-established place so



there is not really much pressure to follow fashion. Whether we are shunned or celebrated we simply get on and work with what we have got. And we have been doing our bit, striving to get the best expression out of Clare. Now it is a matter of telling the story, saying 'this is what we think we have achieved' and hope people acknowledge it."

Grosset Wines, Clare Valley

make good Shiraz and good Chardonnay, but we make the best Semillon in the world. Clare, for example, makes the best Riesling in the southern hemisphere. This is what we need to be getting across. We have to work with what we do best."

Tyrrell's Wines, Hunter Valley



Toby Barlow, Barossa

"Barossa is one of the best recognised Australian regions and probably one of the most important in terms of communicating regional recognition globally. Before St Hallett, I worked in Victoria and with a region like Heathcote it was more of an uphill battle to explain the region. Barossa does, though, have recognition for a good reason, especially with regard to Shiraz.

"But even here there is a need to evolve within the region. I am part of a Barossa Regional Committee, borne out of the Shiraz Alliance, that is looking at terroir. Given Barossa's global recognition, this evolution in regional and sub-regional understanding will also arguably benefit understanding of Australia's regional diversity, too.

"What has been fascinating here is that as a result of difficult times, grape growers started to become winemakers, so there has been a strong link back to the soil, the grassroots, and so a greater understanding of what each sub-region can offer.

"Here at St Hallett we vinified 112 parcels of Shiraz separately last year and we do this every year as it helps us understand the different vineyards, allowing us to make the best single site and single vineyard selections, but also to blend components for greater balance and complexity in other wines. These batches could range from one barrel to 50 barrels, so we are building a database of individual sites. In France they have had hundreds of years to understand this diversity but we are learning fast.

"We can't be all things to all people and it's time to mature. We have the pedigree and quality of wines to be proud of and we should have the conviction to stand by this."

St Hallett, Barossa



"A pillar of the Australian wine industry"

Peter Lehmann, legendary wine producer, was honoured this year with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the International Wine Challenge.

Enotria salutes you and your tremendous achievements in building a world class wine portfolio, and at the same time supporting the grapegrowers of your native Barossa Valley.

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Regional Heroes, the ongoing promotional campaign for independent merchants, restaurants and hotels backed by Wine Australia, has gone from strength to strength, and helped to generate a lift in sales of fine Australian wine, as [Tom Bruce-Gardyne](#) reports

Viewed from the ground, the diversity of Australia's wine regions is soon apparent to anyone who sets foot in the vineyards. Vines are grown coast to coast from beside the Margaret River south of Perth to the Hunter Valley north of Sydney. That's a distance of over 2,000 miles for a very exhausted crew.

Yet from the other end of the telescope, the perspective of a UK consumer, this sense of scale and variety shrinks, especially among those who have never been Down Under.

Australian wine has millions of British fans, but it seems the vast majority still see the category as one country and a handful of well-known grapes. The big brands with their cross-regional blends tend to reinforce this view. They have done a great job bringing consumers to Australia. Now it is time to take them to the next level.

This was the inspiration for Wine Australia's annual Regional Heroes campaign. The programme started in 2007 with the aim of "building awareness of Australia's regionally distinct wines and encouraging trade and consumer uptake, primarily through education", says Wine Australia's Lisa McGovern. The first task was to select

the 20 Regional Heroes defined as "a perfect marriage of the right grape, grown in the right region to produce a winning wine".

Criteria including wine show results, third-party endorsement, export performance and the promotion of a strong regional identity have been used as the benchmarks for the Regional Heroes classification.

Along with proven stars like Barossa Valley Shiraz and Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon, are less well-known wines such as Eden Valley Riesling and Pinot Noir from Tasmania.

This year independents in both the on and off-trades were invited to choose at least six Regional Heroes as new listings and plan a promotional campaign with tastings for staff and consumers. Independents worked together with Wine Australia, which

provided point-of-sale material and training sessions for staff. Participants then had to report back on the effects of the promotion and were evaluated on range of criteria. The most successful businesses were awarded an educational visit to Australia.

As well as introducing consumers to new wines, Regional Heroes was created to help the independent sector grow sales and profit above popular premium price points and build staff awareness of regional differences. In McGovern's eyes, the sector has been absolutely critical in the programme's success because of "its ability to hand-sell the wines". She has been impressed by how well the trade has embraced the campaign, and says Wine Australia is "reaping the benefits of education in terms of building staff knowledge and confidence, and critically this knowledge is now being communicated to the consumer".

McGovern believes the programme "served to ensure a more evolved message has been coming out of Australia". But what do those who took part in this year's campaign feel?

"For us it was the most successful campaign we've ever run, by miles," says Roger Jones at the Harrow at Little Bedwyn in Wiltshire – who bought the inn with his wife 11 years

“ I think focusing on regionality is what people want. They're looking for it in their food, so why not in their wines? ”

SEEKING THE NEXT REGIONAL HEROES

The next campaign will be specifically for independent retailers, with separate activities organised for the on-trade. Participants are asked to promote their regionally distinct wines from Wine Australia's list of 20 Regional Heroes and promote them for a minimum of four weeks, between January and June, 2010.

Wine Australia will provide personalised staff training and all the necessary point-of-sale material for a Regional Heroes promotion. Retailers are invited to provide promotional feedback, and will then be automatically entered into the incentive prize draw for a regional tour of Australia in 2010.



Those wishing to participate should contact Wine Australia at uk@wineaustralia.com, or on 020 7887 5259, and allow plenty of time to plan a cracking campaign.

2009 Winners (pictured below)

Thomas Robert Scargill
Corks Out
Hannah Jane Lovell
SH Jones
Eithne Mary Woodcock
Oddbins
Yann Christophe Le Goualher
Geronimo Inns
Marcin Rafal Aniola
Geronimo Inns
Kyriacos Klitou Sotiri
Soho Wine Supply
Roger Jones
The Harrow at Little Bedwyn
Marcin Andrzej Schilling
Selfridges
Joseph Stephen Murphy
O'Donovan's Off-licence
Noemi Orru
Ely Wine Bar
Thomas Knefelkamp
Radisson SAS Hotel

Regional Heroes



Acting on a tip-off from one of its suppliers, Wine Australia contacted Ruth Yates of Corks Out, an award-winning chain of five wine shops in Cheshire, to see if she'd like to join in this year's Regional Heroes. It proved to be a spectacularly good lead.

The promotion was carefully planned and involved "great support from Wine Australia and our suppliers", says Yates. Some 20 wines were picked and a series of tutored tastings were arranged to inspire staff and customers.

In just two months sales had boomed by 200%. "It was quite incredible. We were absolutely amazed sales grew so much. And the growth has continued with people still coming in and asking for Shiraz from Barossa or Riesling from Clare Valley."



ago. "It was incredible. Sales of Australian wine doubled, especially at the top end, which is what regional Australia is all about." The Harrow was able to offer the incentive of a prize – a wine trip to Australia – with details emailed by Wine Australia to everyone on his mailing list, while a special all-Australian list of 90 wines, of which 30 were available by the glass, was put in place during a two-week promotion. According to Jones the phone never stopped ringing and the restaurant was packed out every night. Among new listings that proved popular were a Pewsey Vale Riesling from the Barossa, and a Tasmanian Pinot Noir.

First-hand experience

At Selfridges in London, head sommelier Dawn Davies has been enthusiastic about regional Australian wines since a trip there in 2005. So when approached about this year's Regional Heroes, she needed little persuading. For Davies "it was a good opportunity and

made a great platform to launch the idea of regionality". The Australian range was expanded to 40 reds and 25 whites – an increase of 20% – and 52 of them were available for tasting during June. The promotion ran all month, and caused "a massive uplift in sales of over 50%", says Davies. "And we're still growing month on month by about 5%."

Kieron Galliard at the Banbury-based wine merchants SH Jones heard of Regional Heroes from Seckford Agencies – one of their main suppliers of regional Australians. "I thought the training would be motivational for our sales staff," he says of his decision to run the promotion for two months in the firm's four shops. In terms of uptake, he says it is "difficult to quantify in sensible terms, as it coincided with a 'big brand' Aussie promo last year, which focussed on volume and price, thus skewing the stats. The average bottle of Australian wine sold in the shops did, however, show a good increase."

Back in London, Karen Rogers, originally from Queensland, found the programme "a perfect fit" for Philglas & Swiggot, the wine business she set up with her husband in 1991. "It's what we have been championing all these years – fine wines from regions around Europe and across the world." She says focusing on regionality is a great way to get people to trade up. "I think it's what people want. They're looking for it in their food, so why not in their wines?" And on this score Philglas & Swiggot certainly appears to be winning, with an average bottle price of more than £15.

To date Australia is almost always displayed on shelves and in restaurants by grape variety. This was certainly the case with all the above. Perhaps one day, wine shops and wine lists will start displaying Australia by region, such that Barossa Valley will be given the same dedicated space as Burgundy. And if that happens, then the country's Regional Heroes really will have arrived. ■

The importance of regionality in

Regionality is a core pillar upon which Australia aims to refocus our attention on its premium wines. With this in mind, **Harpers Wine & Spirit** invited a panel to discuss the challenges Australia faces in communicating its diverse regional offering, asking how best the high-end trade can utilise the concept of regionality to help promote and sell the country's finer wines

Q. What do we consider the trade perception of Australia to be in terms of recognition of regionality?

HA Among sommeliers there is a broad understanding of regionality in Australia, but how this filters through and is communicated to the general public is very mixed. It depends on how people layout their wine lists, how they talk about it and whether they communicate regionality. So while there is understanding in the on-trade, I'm not sure that this gets through to the consumer.

TT I wouldn't necessarily say that there is a great understanding of regional Australia, but then I wouldn't say there was a great understanding of regionality in, say, Burgundy either, so the issue is not just about regionality and Australia.

HA I agree that there isn't any lesser understanding of regionality with Australia than other countries, but I think the next step is to think about how to present this to the consumer. It is different in top restaurants with sommeliers, but on the next tier down, how the message of regionality is presented,

especially on a wine list, is quite mixed.

DG Is this any different from any other countries? Having spent a lot of time over the years selling Italy into quality on and off-trade, there is a willingness or understanding of how to present single vineyards and single estates. But if you stay below £5 or £6 then regionality is a very different thing. So it's not about presenting regionality per se, but about how you do it sector by sector, and this will be a very different approach.

MHS I think the £6 price point is interesting and not just because the consumers are expecting more above and less below. At relatively inexpensive levels you are not going to get the same regional focus in the glass as you are once you are paying £15 or £20-plus. It has to do with regionality in the glass.

Q. How advanced is the consumer perception of Australian regionality?

SA One of the stumbling blocks is a sense of apathy among consumers about Australia. What they don't appreciate is that there are so many regions, and so many young regions such as Mornington Peninsula or Orange, that are totally new to them. But once introduced to these wines it does engage them, so I think the answer lies in getting the wines in front of consumers. And a great thing about Australian wines is that they do tend to consistently deliver a lot of pleasure in the glass.

SJE I agree, except we must be careful not to blame the consumer. Much of what we are here to discuss now is to do with the trade. Speaking for the UK, I think people have a greater understanding of where Australia is and where the regions are than we give them credit for. But I think brands have done enormous damage to Australia. We consumers had a great love and affection for Australia because it introduced drinkable wine and



Images: David Rowland

identifiable varieties. Now it is having to shift to regions first rather than grape variety. So we have to go back and start again. Regionality becomes a good thing to add on, but you have to persuade people to trade up. I do find I get a warm response if I tell people about the region and then they are ready to learn.

SC I think brands have a really important role to play in terms of introducing new customers into the category. Education is hugely important. I don't think the quality of Australian wines is at all bad and I think Brand Champions are incredibly important. If you can give consumers security then they will move on and trade up.

Q. Could big brand owners do more, and should they do more, to support regional and premium Australia?

SC It's difficult to fault really large brands as they are large in volume and so generally



Hamish Anderson: wine list layout is important

selling into the premium sector



selling wines from a broad region, so these are two different things. I believe 5.4% spend over £6 on Australian wine so this is a very small part of the drinking population.

TW But the thing is that the image is set by the 94% and until you get that image right for Australia it is going to be difficult.

AS It's a very difficult balance. Fifteen years ago we were introduced to Australian brands and they were fantastic. We all understood what those brands were, what they signified:

Tasting venue

Smiths of Smithfield
Smithfield Market
66-67 Charterhouse Street
London EC1
smithsofsmithfield.co.uk
September 8, 2009

fruit driven, easy to drink and so on. It's just that the world has become more competitive and Australia is now looking introspectively at what it is and what it isn't doing right. Australia does brands under £6 really well and there is a massive market, so, as long as these wines are reassuring customers and introducing new customers, that's great. Above this a balance, perhaps more along appellation lines, has to be put in place to help elevate customers towards buying more expensive regional brands from smaller producers – buying into heritage, understanding and provenance. How to convey that to consumers, whether in the on or off-trade, is the real challenge.

MHS We have all talked about Brand Australia as if Australia is one industry and we have got to where we are through all working together, but it's now working against us – no-one talks about France as one industry and neither is it the case with Australia. What Australia is realising is that

there is a branded commodity market that does well, and then there is a fine wine market, and we haven't got that message over.

JoJ Our Wine Nation consumer research revealed that around 16% of consumers would buy into this regionality. For a lot of consumers terroir can be a turn off as it can be very hard to understand.

MHS And that's why I don't think you use it at that level. But this concept is not something that's come up from central casting. It's real. When you taste, say, a 2002 Peter Lehmann Reserve Riesling, it's a great wine, great in any company, great in terms of representing how good Eden Valley can be and in a restaurant sits extremely comfortably with the best dry Rieslings from anywhere in the world. And it does this because it's really good, not because we said, "Oh, we need to promote Eden Valley." And when you taste it you are genuinely excited by the wine. ►

REGIONALITY ROUND TABLE

Q. So, how important are initiatives such as Regional Heroes and Landmark Australia Tutorial in encouraging people to buy into this message of regionality?

TW You have to be very careful with regionality. I was talking recently with someone into fine wines, mainly Bordeaux, and he said: “I don’t know where Margaret River is.” So I explained and then talked about the styles of the wine, saying if he liked good red Bordeaux he’d like the reds and if he liked whites from Burgundy or Bordeaux he’d like the whites – and that made sense to this customer.

HA But then if you are talking about classic French wines, I have customers who probably don’t even know where Châteauneuf-du-Pape is on the map of France, but they still know what style of wine they are going to get.

SA This isn’t about regionality for regionality’s sake, it’s about expressing a style, so that a customer can choose between Mornington and Yarra, so they can say, “OK, I want a richer style of Pinot from Yarra.” It’s about using regionality as that tool.

DG Regionality is an adjunct to quality and the message has to be, above all, about quality.

RJ If you are using the term “regionality” as a word for quality instead of “first growth” or “premier” and “grand cru” then maybe it’s not the right word because it doesn’t sound right in this context.

TT There is a sense of trust with French wines and regionality is crucial in a lot of ways, especially if you are trying to sell wines at £40, £50 and £60 on a list. Many people trust Châteauneuf-du-Pape to the point that it doesn’t really matter what the producer name is on the bottle. Regionality is about giving wine a sense of place and that is especially important at the high end. You need to be able



“
Talking about regionality won't mean anything unless the regions show their identity”

to say “this is from Mornington Peninsula and this is what the style of wine is like”.

Q. Regionality, then, can be a useful tool in selling Australian wines at the top end. Surely, even assuming that the quality at this level is a given, you need such tools to wrap around those quality wines to help explain and sell them?

MHS You do. Let me mention the Landmark Tutorial. I was one of the tutors and the tutors, rather than a panel, selected the wines as examples of best of type. Landmark was

about knowledge and teaching people at a far greater level about Australian wine. There was not a presentation in the five days where the wines were not truly terrific. Because it was best foot forward – as it should always be. Don’t tell people the wines are great value then build up. Show people the absolutely exciting wines. This is what it is about and the rest, once you’ve excited people, will trickle down.

SJE I believe we are all agreed that selling wines to consumers, either face to face, by hand as a sommelier or merchant, or through communicating as a journalist, by regionality is a useful thing. But regional doesn’t necessarily mean quality and that is something Australia needs to think about

JoJ Talking about regionality won’t mean anything to consumers unless the regions really stand up and show their identity, so that means talking about Coonawarra Cabernet, Barossa Shiraz or Clare Riesling, And I think Australian regions are doing this very well, finding out what their single best selling point is.

HA This a very important point. In classic parts of Europe you find one or two grape varieties associated with a region. If you like Pinot Noir, you can go to Burgundy. Then, if you want to go further, you can learn about all the villages and so on.

SA This comes back to the point that you can’t just understand regionality with one wine. You need to contrast a Coonawarra Cabernet with Cabernets from Margaret River, McLaren Vale and elsewhere to highlight the regional differences, but you also need to taste a Coonawarra Cabernet against other Coonawarra Cabernets to show the complexity and nuances within the region itself. The gatekeepers, the buyers and the press need to have that kind of experience.

SJE I’d rather Australia didn’t restrict itself to one or two varieties in a region, though. I’m excited, as a wine drinker, by the concept of several different grape varieties matched



with a particular terroir within a region. And Australia does this very well.

JuJ You do have to lead people through this. We need to encourage people, starting with a grape variety they particularly enjoy, then look at why they like that variety, and explore why they might like another wine, suggesting, “well, why not try this as well”, because it fits with what you liked about the first wine. It’s the old story of a drip, drip, drip of information. Not just at formal trade tastings, but also at customer tastings in shops. And regional messages, for us as an independent, really do work.

TT Speaking for myself, if you come to me and say “I’ve got a bloody good wine”, then I’ll listen. Because this is how I’ll go to my customers with a £60 bottle on the list. It’s having the confidence in the wine, being able to say it’s fantastic, it’s from this place and it’s worth it. It’s not about moving people up, but being able to say “this wine deserves to be in this category”.

DG It comes down to the customer you are dealing with. There are a majority of consumers out there that want to buy something safe. Your market is all about premium wines and premium producers.

SJE One thing we haven’t done is talk about the producers. Terroir is about the people as much as about the soil. We have two people here that are part of that story and the Australians tell this better than most, and certainly better than the French. One of the things that makes wines exciting is the people behind them.

Q. The concept of Australia, and the consumer, falling into two distinct categories, polarised between a big



volume, big brand-quaffing camp and the more adventurous fine-wine drinkers, has been raised more than once. Does Australia produce a balanced enough offering across all levels (and, indeed, are the prices right), to allow consumers to bridge the middle ground?

DG I would say yes. Australia does this better than any country in the world. And at £6-£10 a bottle, can also offer quality and volume, which can be a problem with European wines. You can’t really put a price point on where premium wine begins – it’s more of a state of mind. I’m very bullish about



premium Australia and I think many premium producers are doing well.

TW I disagree that there are enough wines to bridge the gap. If you walk into a high street retailer, but want to step up from a cheap deal, it’s difficult to find the stepping-stones above the discount entry-level wines.

MHS It’s because these wines aren’t being shown, partially because of the structure of the UK trade. The wines are still produced, as they were way back when John Ratcliffe took the plunge at Oddbins with several containers of Australian wine, and it was an exciting range of wines. If anything, the Australian offering is more exciting than it has ever been, but it’s just not being translated onto the shelves in the way it could be.

TT It’s all about getting this excitement and building it into people’s hard drive, so sommeliers or merchants, when they go to a customer with a Pinot from Yarra can relate that they are getting great value, great quality, a sense of place. Whether retail, restaurant or wherever, it’s about getting those people involved.

DG I couldn’t agree more. We need to regenerate the excitement. Twenty years ago 80% of wines were made by four or five companies but then there were 900 other producers. Today there are almost 2,600, so diversity and quality are greater than ever, we just have to get that message across.

TT In terms of fine wine, Australia offers more than any other country in the New World and, yes, regionality is extremely important. In fact, it’s key as fine wine shows a sense of place and it’s incredibly important to convey that message. I think this is just starting – the education is really just beginning. ■

The talking heads

- 1 Roger Jones, the Harrow Inn
- 2 Sarah Ahmed, freelance writer and educator
- 3 Andrew Shaw, Waitrose
- 4 Phil Sexton, Giant Steps
- 5 Michael Hill Smith MW, Shaw & Smith
- 6 Terry Threfall, Chez Bruce
- 7 Hamish Anderson, Tate Galleries

- 8 David Gleave MW, Liberty Wines
- 9 Sam Caporn, Constellation
- 10 Thomas Woolrych, Laithwaites
- 11 Julia Jenkins, Flagship Wines
- 12 Andrew Catchpole, chair
- 13 Jo Jericho, Wingara Wine Group
- 14 Sarah Jane Evans MW, writer and broadcaster



The view from Victoria

Compact but endlessly varied, Victoria's geographical diversity provides a telling template for its wines, says **Andrew Catchpole**

Despite its relatively modest size, Victoria is as diverse as any state in Australia and this is clearly reflected in the wines. Travel from the surf-slaked beaches skirting the vertiginously stacked Twelve Apostles, by way of the cosmopolitan culinary epicentre of Melbourne, to the winter snowfields of the Victorian Alps and the changes in landscape, culture, climate and elevation are striking. And this ever-changing picture is also revealed in the soils.

Kick off the dull red, Pinot-friendly volcanic dirt gathered "uphill" in Mornington and head to the Yarra. Here, strikingly red, friable volcanic soils vie with

ancient sandy clay loams spiked with sandstone. In Heathcote, one finds an exposed early Cambrian greenstone seam. This is some of the oldest soil on earth, yet suited perfectly to the modern-day Shiraz vine.

From a winemaking perspective this combination of old, mineral-rich soils, plus a plethora of cool climate sites, is ideal for the high end, terroir-focused wines at which Victoria excels.

Victoria has already established an enviable reputation for elegant, expressive Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, savoury, spicy Shiraz (or Syrah) and intense fortified Muscats. And these quality benchmarks are increasingly complemented by a roll call of



Rhône, Italian and other varieties as exploration, experimentation and growing experience continue to shape a still unfolding winemaking scene.

The upshot is at once a complex and dynamic collection of mainly youthful regions and producers, yet ones already well noted for producing fine wines fully expressive of their terroir. In many ways, Victoria provides an ideal microcosm for understanding the broader ongoing evolution and development across Australia. ■



Tourism Victoria

Key regions & varietals

Yarra Valley – elegant, minerally Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, fine sparkling wines, plus aromatic, European-leaning Shiraz/Syrah from this cool climate

Mornington Peninsula – cool maritime climate delivers sensual but intense Pinot Noir showing varietal clarity, plus finely textured Chardonnay

Heathcote – superb Shiraz from ancient Cambrian soils, showing rich, plummy, spicy, minerally depths, often with great ability to age

Grampians – distinct, aromatic, peppery-spiced, savoury Shiraz courtesy of cool autumns and cold nights

Beechworth – exciting up-and-coming region where Shiraz, Chardonnay, Rhône and Italian varietals are hitting high notes from artisan scale producers

Macedon Ranges – world-class sparkling wines from a region that experiences regular winter snow falls

Goulburn Valley – home to two of Victoria's oldest wineries, Tahbilk and Mitchelton, and known for fine Rhône varieties

Rutherglen – historic region celebrated for incredible, intense, impossibly long-lived fortified wines

Victoria overview

- Viticulture was established in Victoria in the early 1850s in the Yarra Valley, near Melbourne
- Victoria remained Australia's primary wine-producing colony until the outbreak of phylloxera in the 1880s
- The Victorian wine industry was reinvigorated by 16 wineries in 1966
- Victoria now has 3000 growers across 21 wine regions
- There are more than 850 wineries and a remarkable 650 cellar doors.

Pioneering Victoria

Despite emerging as one of Australia's leading regions for cool climate fine wine, Victoria continues to be a hotbed of discovery and innovation, as **Andrew Catchpole** reports

There are echoes of Victoria's heady mid-19th century gold rushes in the state's wine industry today. Much of Victoria's viticultural heritage stretches back to this time, when the gold output exceeded anything the world had ever known, and vines fast went into the ground to help slake the thirst of these rowdy times. It was around this time that Yarra Valley, the oldest wine region in Victoria, was established, though Tahbilk in Goulburn Valley is where this legacy is most famously visible in the evocative winery dating back to 1860. This was the beginning of a winemaking boom that saw Victoria rank, for a while, as the number one producer in Australia.

Yet, despite this long history under vine,

modern Victoria is best understood as a recent, and still developing, collection of small regions, aimed squarely at the production of quality wines.

Winemaking almost dried up here by the middle of the last century, slowly recovering from the 1960s on as a new breed of prospecting winemakers returned, reviving and rediscovering regions, including Yarra and Mornington Peninsula, Grampians and Heathcote, Beechworth and Pyrenees, plus many others. And the pioneering goes on.

The 21 regions, or GIs, spread across Victoria are testimony to the incredible geographical and climatic diversity in this state. Vineyards range from maritime-influenced locations cooled by breezes off the breathtakingly chilly Southern Ocean, to those of more continental climate across the tail end of the Great Dividing Range, where cool diurnal swings, often amplified by elevation, impart aromatic complexity to the wines.

"Victoria is about the size of England but offers enormous diversity in terms of growing vines and the bulk of this activity is in the cooler regions of the state," says Chris Pfeiffer, Victoria Wine Industry Association chairman and winemaker at Pfeiffer Wines.

"This is reflected in the style of the wines, with Victoria adding a lot to the Australian palette thanks to the range from cool, maritime climates such as Mornington Peninsula, via the ancient soils of Heathcote, to historic regions such as Rutherglen, where some of the world's great fortified wines are made," he adds.

What's more, new regions, new sites within those regions and the nooks and crannies of more established areas are all being eyed, tried and tested as Victoria's grape growers



and winemakers seek out the best terroir for their chosen vines. Even in the Yarra, with 3,600ha under vine, making it the biggest fine wine region in Victoria (and arguably also the best recognised), the experimentation with sites and varieties goes on.

"Yes, as I think we've shown, we can make some pretty fine Chardonnay and Pinot Noir and some good Syrah too," says De Bortoli's Steve Webber. "But we wouldn't want to be confined to two or three varieties because we are still experimenting with others that may well make excellent wine in the future."

Webber, whose keen mind is tempered by an easygoing nature that expresses itself in his Riorret label (think about this), has plantings of Nebbiolo and Sangiovese on warmer north-facing slopes and is experimenting with other varieties, including Sagrantino.

What's more, a rambling dinner over home-culled, cured and cooked pig chez Webber throws up a group of self-styled "young punks", namely Timo Mayer, Luke Lambert, Bill Downie and Gary Mills of Jamsheed.



Victoria's wines are proving excellent food partners in restaurants around the world



Victoria's vineyards are helping to champion the charge towards regionality



Victoria offers enormous diversity in growing vines and the bulk of this activity is in the cooler regions

Despite (or rather because of) their boutique, experimental philosophies – all funkiness and wild ferments with minimum intervention, plus a predilection for the word Syrah – these four form a surprisingly like-minded party with the front man of the De Bortoli wine dynasty.

Yarra offers some great contrasts, from well-established names such as De Bortoli, Yering Station, Coldstream Hills and Domaine Chandon, by way of high-end, moneyed boutique operations such as TarraWarra, to passionate start-ups like Mac Forbes Wines.

Following a commercial wine career, then winemaking stints in Austria and with Dirk

Niepoort in the Douro, Mac Forbes returned to his native Yarra convinced that “this region, with its distinct terroirs, can make some of the best wines in the world”.

The upshot, in a few short years, has been a range of wines, rooted in Pinot Noir, that clearly express not just Yarra, but Yarra sub-regions, with a clarity as marked as that in the Grand and Premier Crus of Burgundy. With a cheeky smile, Forbes unfolds a personally designed map, which identifies Yarra sub-regions of Dixons Creek, Yarra Glen, Coldstream, Gruyere, Woori Yallock, Wesburn and Hoddles Creek.

As Forbes points out, these sub-regions are clearly up for debate, but without putting the idea out there the discussion may never take place. This cuts right to the heart of a focus on ever more sub-regional, single vineyard and even single block sites that I discover across Victoria as winemakers grasp the full complexity and explore the best possibilities of their terroir.

Similarly, on the Mornington Peninsula,

which has developed 220 vineyards, 80 wineries and 60 cellar doors in little over a couple of decades, several tastings of Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs left little doubt as to how quickly Australia is maturing and adapting in relation to the sometimes troublesome French term of “terroir”.

Personality driven

However, something the French often overlook is that terroir also has a human element and this is something Australia delivers in droves. The eminently approachable Martin Spedding at Ten Minutes by Tractor explained that part of the underpinning concept of the winery was, in addition to inter-vineyard blends, to make three high-end wines from three vineyards that happened to be, as you’ve guessed, 10 minutes distance from each other by tractor.

Since the first commercial vintage in 2000, three very distinct styles have emerged from the Ten Minutes’ Wallis, McCutcheon and Judd vineyards, with a detectable theme, ►

VICTORIA OVERVIEW

but clearly different fruit, structural and mineral attributes threaded through each of the Pinot Noirs I tried. “What is interesting about the three different wines is that they show three very different personalities and this is central to our story,” says Spedding. As interesting was the contrast between Ten Minutes wines and those of Kooyong or Yabby Lake or Stonier, reflecting in broader brushstrokes the differences in soils between the red volcanic “uphill” slopes and the loam and clay of “downhill”.

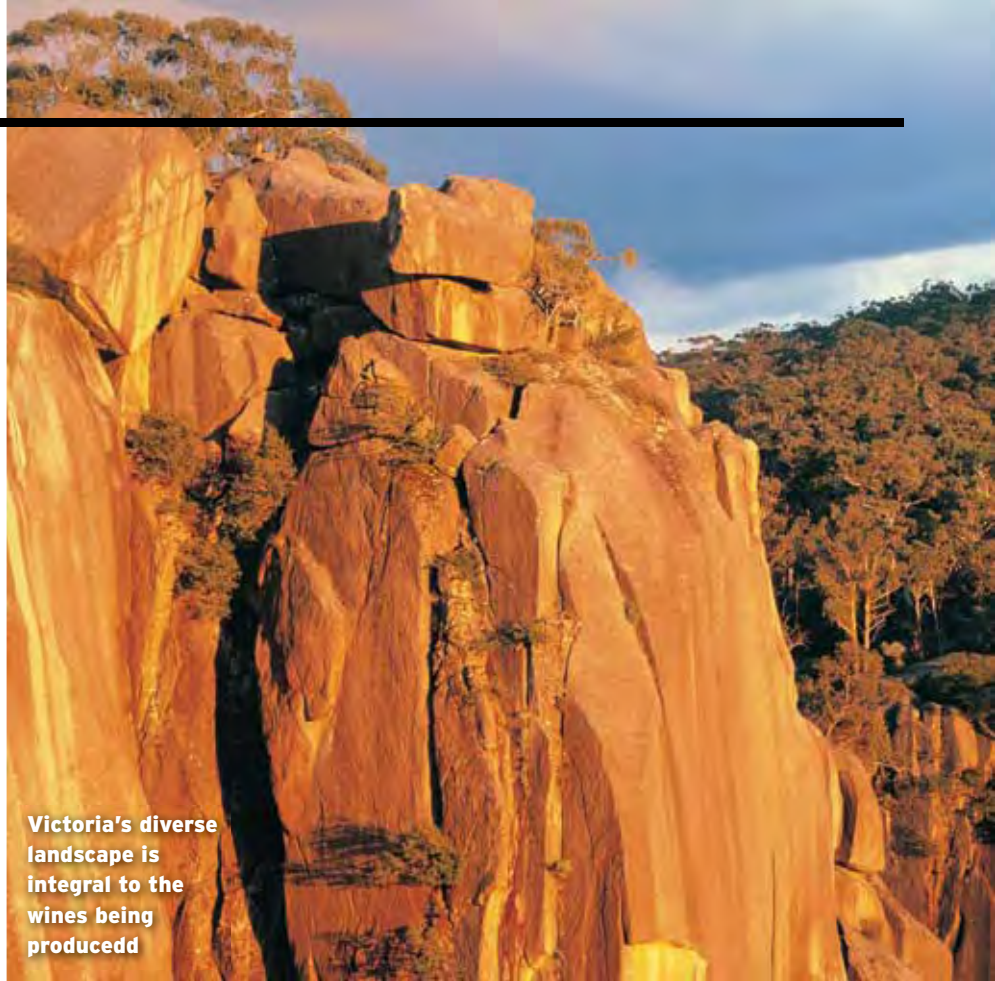
Finesse is a word that perhaps best sums up Victoria’s cooler climate wine styles, expressed with most clarity in the Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays of Mornington and Yarra, where Shiraz/Syrah is making its mark too, along with sparkling wines.

Shiraz is capable of rising to great heights in Grampians, Heathcote and Pyrenees, where richer, but still finely structured, spicy wines reveal mineral complexity and longevity. Other varieties, including Cabernet and Cabernet blends, Semillon, Viognier and Riesling, are found here too.

Even historic wineries, such as Tahbilk and nearby Mitchelton in the Goulburn Valley, continue to innovate and experiment with site selection, clonal material and varieties. Here Rhône varieties deliver impressive results, underpinned by Tahbilk’s classic and long-lived Marsanne.

Winemaking history pervades Rutherglen too, where Muscat and Tokays provide a luscious base for rich and intense fortified wines at producers such as Campbells, though the table wine styles, again primarily rooted in the Rhône varieties, can be very good too.

For a great snapshot of what the immediate future might hold in terms of new plantings and varieties, look no further than the King



Victoria’s diverse landscape is integral to the wines being produced

Valley, where Nebbiolo, Sangiovese and Arneis are among the vines that have taken root where, until recently, tobacco plants still thrived. At nearby Brown Brothers, which has made a speciality of vinifying a mind-boggling array of single varietals, some 40 are on offer at the cellar door alone. It gives an insight into what is grown and what can still be achieved.

Sustainable approach

Also worth a mention is how many wineries are sustainably run, often embracing organic or biodynamic practices in a quest to produce fine wine while nurturing soils. And, at the biodynamic end, producers such as Curly Flat

(Macedon Ranges), Jasper Hill (Heathcote), Lethbridge (Geelong) and Terlato & Chapoutier (Pyrenees) eschew mention of this on their label, preferring to let the wines do the talking.

It comes as no surprise that outsiders have been sourcing from, investing in or even relocating to the region.

These vinous adventurers range from Moss Wood winery, which is sourcing and making a Pinot Noir to rival its home-grown Margaret River wine, to Rhône vigneron Michel Chapoutier, who has three joint projects across as many Victorian regions. “I decided on Australia because of its long history with the Syrah grape and because I am a soil lover and Australia has the oldest soils in the world,” says Chapoutier. “The diversity is amazing, like a second France.”

Bigger groups and even multinationals also have interests here, from Lion Nathan’s regional portfolio outposts such as Stonier and Mitchelton, to Foster’s Coldstream Hills and Moët Hennessy’s sparkling Domaine Chandon. Yering Station and Mount Langi Ghiran, too, are part of a regional group. What is notable, though, is that even the biggest of owners have simply encouraged these wineries to make the best and most expressive regional wines they can.

All have been drawn to Victoria by a vision of exciting, cool climate, regional diversity, the possibility of sublime terroir and the freedom to make whatever wines best express this merging of climate, culture and soils.

And, in doing so, they continue to drive forward the story of Australia’s fine and regional wine. ■

Winemakers claim restaurants could make a credible wine list with Victorian wines alone



Promoting Victorian values

With Victoria proving an excellent microcosm for exploring the messages of cooler-climate, regional Australia, **Harpers Wine & Spirit** invited some of its leading winemakers to discuss the opportunities and challenges in this diverse state

Victoria has established a reputation as a producer of cooler-climate, smaller-scale, site-specific fine wines. As such, its development, both in terms of exploring and best exploiting its regionality, coupled with insight into how best to promote essentially small-scale regions

to the world, makes for a fascinating study.

Above all, these winemakers believe in a high-quality future for Victoria and are passionate in their belief that this is already apparent in the wines. The next step is to get this message out and about in the broader wine-drinking world.

Sandro Mosele

"At Kooyong, and in the Mornington, we are committed to lower alcohol and more restrained styles – and want ageability, so we are after a little more austerity in the wines. These are restaurant-focused wines – after all, I'm Italian. It's interesting to see the influence and change in Wine Australia's focus on regionality, cooler climate and smaller producers, and there is a realisation that there is quality at the top end as well as big producers at the lower end, with four companies accounting for 80% of production.

"When our wines are shown we never focus on being Australian, but highlight Mornington. What defines us as Mornington? Because of the climate and the maritime influence, the underlying acidity is very good, so we have very vivid wines, not high in alcohol, showing elegance and poise. The hallmarks of Mornington are clarity, linearity and texture, with floral notes. I also believe that Chardonnay is as fickle as Pinot Noir, so it is very important where it is planted.

"Terroir is real, but everyone has to allow their wines to express it. I hope Wine Australia continues to focus on Australia's varied terroir. We first marketed Australia off the big companies but now we can promote the differences that we offer. If we compare Australia



to Burgundy, then Burgundy has been promoting itself off DRC, a 2ha site, and grand cru, which is 2% of production; we have been promoting ourselves off the equivalent of basic Bourgogne rouge.

"What is really healthy for us, though, is that we are competing with Burgundy across price points on restaurant lists in Melbourne and Sydney. This is culturally important for us, competing against Pinot Noirs from around the world."

Winemaker and president, Mornington Peninsula Vignerons Association Kooyong

Tony Jordan



"The whole concept of regionality in Victoria and in Australia is growing, and this creates a challenge because it needs to coincide with

an understanding from wine drinkers. In Australia, a region like Yarra has become part of the furniture, but Brand Australia has, in the past, been dumbing down the message, with little emphasis on regionality, so we need to get out there and tell the world what we are doing. Although Yarra has a long history of producing wine, it still needs to educate people about its styles.

"If you look at a regional map of Victoria, the GIs are spread over many parts because Victoria has a large number of regions suitable for viticulture. There are still potential sites to explore but certainly some regions are becoming well recognised. Beechworth and King Valley are examples, while Heathcote is becoming very popular. It takes a while, though, for regionality to become more widely recognised. A critical mass needs to be achieved and this takes time.

"For a long time the message from brand Australia was 'all Australian wine is good', and Australia concentrated on getting this message out. But we all know, in terms of price and quality, that the message now has to go beyond this. The big companies understand that unless Australia has a fine wine image it doesn't have a good image. We also need to get rid of our grape surplus because, inevitably, people with surplus will sell for whatever price they can.

"Once you focus on the finer wines many of the smaller companies have a lot of personalities and Australia needs these people to get out there and speak out, telling the fine wine story, not just the Australian story. Fine wine is only around 15% of production, the same as in many other countries including France, but with only 2,000-odd Australian producers, a very high proportion are fine wine producers. We have to look at this balance and show our top wines because a good reputation rests in the fine wines."

Ex-Chandon Australia winemaker and consultant, Victoria

Mac Forbes

"I've worked for Southcorp, doing a turn in the UK, but decided I wanted to do something small and sustainable, so after stints working with people including Dirk Niepoort I came home to the Yarra.

"Victoria has so much diversity and even here, in the Yarra, I think we have decades before we really understand all of our sites and soils. There is an urgency to learn and to communicate so much more, and this is part of the reason why I make a range of vineyard-specific wines from different sites in the valley. Australia has been bingeing on blends or single estate wines, but sub-regionality and single vineyard wines help to focus on and explore the potential terroir in a way that blends never can.

"Here, it is a matter of finding the best sites for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay but I'm also making five different Pinots from five different sites so we can express and explore the terroir. I've also just created a map identifying seven sub-regions [in the Yarra Valley] that should spark some lively comment. The specifics of the sub-regions are an area for debate but if you don't have a crack at trying then the discussion will never get going. There



are clearly very different structures and textures in the Pinots from the different sites, showing differing terroirs of Yarra, and this should help people understand that this French concept is equally valid in relation to Australian wine.

"One of the big challenges is to change the perception of Australian wine, but at the same time to continue to discover where and how we can make our best wines. We might not have the history, but we have the flexibility to ensure that we can continue to evolve, and part of the next stage of that evolution is more vineyard-specific wines."

**Winemaker, Mac Forbes Wines
Yarra Valley**

Martin Spedding

"The success of Australia's volume-led producers has been a double-edged thing. It has brought Australian wines to a wider audience but now that demand is down, there is a push to focus on smaller, boutique production and the lighter end of the market, stylistically. Mornington, with 80 wineries, almost all of which are family-run businesses, is all about regionality and higher-end wines and is very well suited to this shift in emphasis.

"I think and hope that over the next few years the image and face of Australian wine will become more balanced and broader, not just resting on what is euphemistically termed the 'value' end. Victoria encapsulates the diversity of Australia perfectly, with 800 wineries and 21 of the country's 62 GIs. Victoria has the greatest number of small producers and the greatest number of regions, so it is a great showcase for the kind of variety to be found across all of Australia's diverse regions.

"I would argue that everyone, including big producers like Foster's and Constellation, all have a strong incentive for focusing on regionality. They already have regional portfolios. They can use this hook to leverage away from the value image and grow average price points, and help all in doing so by promoting quality and regionality. In Mornington we are a young region and so are still finding the clones and sites that work best, but even in the past 10 to 20 years we have come a long way and are beginning to better understand our terroir."

**Ten Minutes by Tractor
Mornington Peninsula**



Ray Nadeson



"Sustainability is going to be absolutely critical to the future of Australian wine. Most Australian wine is produced in irrigation areas and the economics rely on high yields. These areas have seen massive cuts in water allocation so efficiency in water use is going to be critical. Biodynamics is just one method of approaching sustainability: it certainly offers great benefits in terms of the water-holding capacity of soils and we are using it, among other things, as a method of drought-proofing our vineyards.

"Our decision to grow organically and biodynamically was really about two things: first, being responsible, sustainable and caring for the land;

and second, we see a direct benefit. If we have healthy soil we can grow better fruit, and that allows the terroir to show through. Then we can make better, more interesting wines.

"We see biodynamics as one of the things that make our wine what it is, not a marketing tool, so this is why we don't display it on the label. We don't want a reputation for being biodynamic. We want to make great wine.

"Ten years down the track we do see that we are very much at the beginning of the journey. We are beginning to really know our terroir. Early on we experimented with lots of techniques, imagining that we could influence and control the wine. Looking back we see a constant character showing through. Our challenge now is to work with what we have and to complement the terroir through winemaking techniques. It's a bit like ageing. As you get to know yourself better, you work to your strengths."

**Winemaker, Lethbridge
Geelong**

Dan Buckle

"I've been making wine here for six years now and for me it's still a fascinating region. I'm still learning a lot about the various terroirs and I'm very intent on the whole notion that wine should taste of where it comes from.

"The Grampians is a pretty amazing and challenging region anyway, with a lot of mesoclimates and a lot of variation in soil types, so it's taken time to get to know the vineyards and the styles of Shiraz here. Stylistically, warmer-climate Australian Shiraz is quite different to what we are doing here so it is useful for us to put our Shiraz in a global context, and you can't help but look at Saint-Joseph and Hermitage for comparisons.

"We have granitic soils, which you find in some top Rhône sites, and also a strong wind in the valley which, although we have a continental climate, does deliver some cooling breezes from the Southern Ocean, a bit like the mistral. And we have some really old vines. There is a general

Grampians style of wine, but it's a big area and so, just like any region in France, isn't homogenous. However, I think we can also learn from the resonance between the Old and New World.

"It's not that we want our wines to taste like Rhône wines. They should taste like Langi wines, the best expression of our vineyards and soils. But we have learned to move away from the idea that big is beautiful. Talk to producers in the Rhône and they are not so interested in whether their wines are full-bodied, tannic and so on, but rather that the wine is balanced.

"It's clear that Shiraz, as Australia's widest planted variety, can make fruity red booze. But for us, here in the Grampians, it goes well beyond that. It is also a floral variety, showing violets and perfume, delicate aromatics, plus savoury and spicy qualities and we want to take this to the next level."

Winemaker, Mount Langi Ghiran Grampians



Phil Sexton

"What is really good about Yarra as a wine region is that people work pretty closely together in the vineyards, and so it doesn't really feel as if we are all competing. The biggest plus point of the Yarra, and why I used my Margaret River winery as a stepping stone to get here, comes down to our terroir.

"This is a cool-to-cold region, with low vigour and high summer diurnal variation, which equals low pH and good acidity. We don't have to add any acid and a long, slow ripening, where we generally get synchronisation of sugar and physiological ripeness, is perfect for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. We also get terrific results from Cabernet and Merlot in the warmer sites.

"The proximity to Melbourne also gives us very good cellar-door trade, and means we always have somewhere great to eat. It's a fantastic wine culture here and both Yarra and Victoria have a creative and passionate wine community that is not as corporately driven as in some other regions. I think there is still a long way to go in Yarra but I believe it will become the most important Chardonnay and Pinot Noir region in the southern hemisphere.

"We are only just starting, and the region has a wine history going back to the 1840s. The approach here is very vineyard-centric, as opposed to technique-based, and the general collective approach is to master our sites so that we can pick at lower sugar levels while achieving full ripeness. Elegance, age worthiness and subtlety are the disciplines we all share and seek to further master."

Co-owner, Giant Steps and Innocent Bystander Yarra Valley



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YERING
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A taste of Victoria

With Australia striving to emphasise its regionally distinct identities, we invited a panel of experienced tasters to put a selection of Victorian regional varieties to the test. **Andrew Catchpole** was there to assess the findings

Tasting venue

Australian Centre, Strand, London
August 25, 2009

Wine consultant **Walter Speller** was impressed by producers' focus on terroir

This was an intriguing and challenging session for the tasters who were tasked with prising out regional character and assessing typicity from blind flights of wine. The premise was simple. Four flights of around 12-16 wines were shown, comprising Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Shiraz/Syrah and Muscat, with wines arranged within each flight into regional groupings. Represented were: Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula and Grampians; Shiraz from Rutherglen, Nagambie Lakes, Heathcote, Grampians, Yarra and Pyrenees; plus Muscat from Rutherglen and elsewhere in Victoria.

This much the tasters knew, but not the order of wines, or numbers per region. Most wines would typically be priced for the UK off-trade at £15 to £30 – also revealed after tasting. Wines ranged primarily from estate level to site or block-specific samples allowing clear contrasts to be seen within a given GI and even sub-region.

Featured wineries

Best's Wines, Trentham Estate, Shelmerdine, Innocent Bystander, Giant Steps, Punt Road, De Bortoli, Yering Station, Stonier, Kooyong, Ten Minutes by Tractor, Mac Forbes, Moss Wood, Campbells of Rutherglen, Tahbilk, McPherson, Brown Brothers, Sanguine Estate, Domaine Terlato & Chapoutier and Stanton & Killeen.

Later, as the identity of the wines was revealed, a mixture of delight and surprise swept the panel, with raised eyebrows competing with the odd emphatic “yes!” as tasters re-examined their own assessments and scores.

Julia Jenkins of Flagship Wines opened the debate to broad agreement, suggesting “the overall quality of the wines was impressive” and were considered to be largely (but not always) in line with price expectation.

The Pinots, Chardonnays and Shirazes

were widely described as having “complexity”, “intensity”, “refreshing acidity” and “minerality”. Clear varietal fruit expression, generally matched by fine aromatic and structural qualities, including tannins, was widely noted.

It was agreed that the cool and cooler climate was writ large over many of the wines. Correspondingly, very few of the wines were big blockbusters and oak treatment was, overall, considered largely harmonious and in balance. Theo Sloot of the Oxford Wine Company echoing others, found the Chardonnays “the most consistent of the flights” and, more broadly, remarked on “some lovely, fresh, aromatic wines”.

Terroir the key

However, the real meat of the discussion rested on typicity and terroir. As expected, it was difficult to pin down a specific wine (Rutherglen Muscats aside) to a given region. But broad stylistic traits were identified, especially with the Chardonnays and Pinot



Ruth Yates (front) and Lance Foyster sample some reds

Noirs, which were largely from Mornington and Yarra.

Martin Lam of Ransome's Dock, who found the Chardonnays easier to identify, was one of several who felt these regions had established a style. "Yarra manages to get minerality into its wines," he said. "Typicity is all about balance, minerality and structure and the Yarra wines showed a common theme."

Yarra, with its slightly tighter structures and often more angular aromatic and mineral notes, was contrasted with Mornington, where the maritime climate delivers sometimes delicate, though often still intense Chardonnays and Pinots. "The tasting showed that Mornington and Yarra are both great for these grape varieties," said wine consultant Walter Speller. "For me, Yarra was more ripe, Mornington lighter, but it wasn't always easy to clearly place the wines."

The variation in styles from these regions was thought a plus by several tasters, showing a growing winemaking maturity in allowing the wines to best express differences of climate and site, rather than winemaking hand.

"With both regions, and even within each region, it's a bit like talking about the appellations in Burgundy and expecting all of the producers, all of the sites, to produce a similar style of wine," said Jenkins.

Walter Speller agreed. "The most interesting thing was that winemakers are clearly finding

Best in show



Chardonnay
Innocent Bystander Chardonnay 2007, Yarra Valley
Importer: Liberty Wines (020 7720 5350)

Ten Minutes by Tractor McCutcheon Vineyard Chardonnay 2007, Mornington Peninsula
Importer: H&H Bancroft (020 7232 5450)

Yering Station Reserve Chardonnay 2005, Yarra Valley
Importer: Entria World Wine (020 8963 4239)



Pinot Noir
Mac Forbes Woori Yallock Pinot Noir 2006, Yarra Valley
Importer: Clark Foyster Wines (020 8567 3731)

Kooyong Ferrous Pinot Noir 2004, Mornington Peninsula
Importer: Great Western Wine (01225 322800)



Shelmerdine Pinot Noir 2008, Yarra Valley
Importer: Alliance Wine (01505 506060)

Shiraz/Syrah
De Bortoli Reserve Syrah, Yarra Valley
Importer: De Bortoli Wines UK (01752 516467)



Innocent Bystander Shiraz Viognier 2006, Yarra Valley
Importer: Liberty Wines

Sanguine Estate D'Orsa Shiraz 2006, Heathcote
Importer: Great Western Wine

Muscat
Campbells of Rutherglen Classic Muscat NV, Rutherglen
Importer: Awın Barratt Siegel Wine Agencies (01372 274065)

the expression of their vineyards and the focus in many of these wines is on terroir," he said. "However, while I do think that regional identity is emerging, sub-regional identity is far more difficult to understand because we have not had enough exposure or experience of the wines."

Local difficulties

With Shiraz/Syrah sourced from six GIs, it was perhaps the most challenging flight to identify regional origins. What could be said confidently is that many wines showed hallmarks of floral and violet aromatics, with a complex blend of good acidity, fine but firm tannins, and savoury, spicy character suggesting cool-climate. The panel was

largely confident in identifying cooler-climate Victorian, rather than say Barossa or McLaren character, but far less certain with Heathcote, Grampians or Yarra.

For Ian Waddington, group buyer at the Gordon Ramsay Group, this level of regional distinction was useful but not necessarily for every customer. "Regionality is a useful tool for marketing and the trade, but there is a long way for the customers to go before they come anywhere close to this level," he said.

By reply, Slood summed up the session neatly. "For the consumers, Australian regionality is still in its early days," he said. "I think we will get there through a trickle-down effect, but it will be a slow trickle." ■

The tasters

- 1 **Andrew Catchpole**, editor, freelance
- 2 **Lance Foyster MW**, merchant, Clark & Foyster
- 3 **Walter Speller**, consultant
- 4 **Kyri Sotiri**, co-owner, Soho Wine Supply
- 5 **Martin Lam**, chef proprietor,

- Ransome's Dock
- 6 **Ruth Yates**, merchant, Corks Out
- 7 **Julia Jenkins**, merchant, Flagship Wines
- 8 **Ian Waddington**, group buyer, Gordon Ramsay Group
- 9 **Lisa McGovern**, director UK, Ireland,

- Europe, Wine Australia
- 10 **Laura Rhys**, head sommelier, TerraVina
- 11 **Theo Slood**, merchant, The Oxford Wine Company
- 12 **Stacey-Lee Edwards**, head sommelier, River Café



Drinking Australia

Australia's wine merchants, restaurateurs and sommeliers often present wine in a refreshing and engaging way to their customers. There's much here we could learn, says Andrew Catchpole, on the art of selling Australian wine

The breadth and sophistication of Australia's food and wine scene frequently comes as something of a surprise to first-time visitors from the UK, used as they are to images of a barbecue and bag-in-box culture played out under a warm southern sun. But decades of immigration, not least from China, Italy, Greece, Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia, coupled with high-quality produce from both land and sea, have conspired to create a food culture that is second to none in its diversity and fresh modern presentation.

One of the more visible aspects of this, aside from the proliferation of cafés, bistros, restaurants and bars across Australia, is the extraordinary number of publications and column inches given over to restaurants, food and wine. What this adds up to is a culture where wine and food knowledge is high, where wine is seen as a natural extension of good eating, to be explored, experimented with and – without too much pretension – enjoyed.

One fascinating aspect is how methods of retailing wine differ from the UK in perhaps simple, but nonetheless innovative, ways. Walk into a mid-market chain such as Vintage

Cellars in Melbourne and this immediately becomes apparent. Wines are ordered by variety. Above each section – Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet blends, for example – talker boards then group wines by approximate style under headings such as Good with Beef, with brief style descriptors in each sub-section plus leading producer names.

“Many customers are quite adventurous, interest is growing in varieties such as Nebbiolo and Arneis”

At the rather more niche and upmarket-focused Prince Wine Store in South Melbourne (one of three outlets in the city), a well-selected international range of wines are again arranged by variety and then sub-sectioned by region and country of origin. Thus cool-climate Victorian, Tasmanian and Adelaide Hills Pinot Noirs bed down with those from Central Otago and Burgundy.

Well placed to make a comparison with the Old World is Sylvaine Novel, a young French winemaker who worked the past season at Mac Forbes in the Yarra, and is now at a Prince off-shoot in a nearby shopping centre. “It’s much more varietal than in France or Britain,” she observes. “A lot of customers are quite adventurous and interest is growing in varieties such as Nebbiolo and Arneis. It’s helpful to have both Australian and Italian examples grouped so customers can better understand the origins and styles of the variety.”

Comparative tastings, backed by good staff training, and an easy approach to dealing with customers adds up to an enthusiastic retail environment. This is then complemented by an offering that is easier to navigate than one laid out by country and sub-region alone.

The restaurant and bar trade here also benefits – as it does in many Australian states – from proximity to the wine regions. Cellar doors proliferate at the wine estates, with food offerings ranging from simple, seasonal platters to sophisticated cuisine often delivered in airily designed, modern showcases for wine such as Yering Station, Domaine Chandon or Ten Minutes by Tractor, and many, many

Giant Steps Winery and Cellar Door, 336 Maroondah Hwy, Healesville, Victoria

The more hoary handed old timers of Healesville might have been forgiven for thinking the alien hordes had landed when the sublimely modern Giant Steps-Innocent Bystander winery and cellar door landed in their country town. But this steel, wood and glass gastronomic oasis is merely the most striking of the many civilised vinous pitstops peppered around Yarra and other wine regions in Victoria.

Giant Steps is the brainchild of Phil Sexton, winemaker, brewer and entrepreneur, whose past ventures include the Little Creatures micro-brew-restaurant in Fremantle, Western Australia. It is, in essence, a distillation of all that's thrilling about the food and wine culture in Australia, combining an artisan bakery, coffee roasting, a wood-fired pizzeria, cheese room and bistro with a list offering the full Giant Steps and Innocent Bystander ranges, plus a lengthy Australian and global guest list of well-heeled wines at the cellar door. And Little Creature's latest micro-brewing venture, White Rabbit, is next door.

"In Australia wine is seen in context with food, with the good things in life. People can easily travel from Melbourne, an hour away, to visit and taste local wines at the cellar doors," says Sexton.



"For us, this is a natural thing to combine all of these elements in a relaxed way at the winery." He adds that Giant Steps attracts 3,000-4,000 visitors a week, 40% of whom are regulars, pulling in big dollars for the winery and building the brand at first hand.

Democratic, relaxed and funky, it represents Australia's refreshing approach to putting wine into a lifestyle context.

giantsteps.com



others besides. Mornington Peninsula, for example, has around 80 wineries and no less than 60 cellar doors, with 70-odd cellar doors also present in the Yarra.

Once again, as the case studies here show, wines in restaurants and bars are often listed by variety or style, then region, with guidance or notes on the individual style of a given listing. As Melbourne-born sommelier Stacey Lee Edwards, now at the River Café in London, says: "In Melbourne wine knowledge is quite high, but this is further enhanced by the sophisticated restaurant and bar scene where wine lists are written to be as accessible as possible, with a lot of choice by-the-glass, and often by variety and then region."

This creates a virtuous circle. A little wine knowledge is enough to navigate the list. Its construction then rewards this knowledge with several choices related to what the customer already knows. Wine knowledge increases, while adventurous drinking is encouraged, and so restaurant, customer and more interesting wines all stand to win. And, as wine knowledge increases, customers are likely to trade up, which is great for the bottom line. ■

Cutler & Co, 55-57 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne

First seen as a rising star at 211, chef Andrew McConnell has continued his ascent of Melbourne's sophisticated dining scene, overseeing both swish city-centre restaurant Cumulus, plus the hipper Cutler & Co tucked away in edgier Fitzroy. The international wine list rises to the impeccably executed Australian cuisine, presented first by variety or style, then grouped by region and finally listed in order of weight of the wine.

Its whole presentation is designed to ease customers towards stress-free wine comparison. The Victorian/Australian



Chardonnays and white Burgundies are grouped side by side, and Italian varietals from Italy and Australia intermingle on the page, setting an example of how lists can explode old hierarchies and democratise wine. "We want to show some really great international wines and highlight emerging producers, interesting regions and varietals," says Adam Cash, restaurant manager.

Perhaps the best explanation of its wine ethos came while eavesdropping on my neighbours over bar-side dishes of chorizo, octopus and aioli and crispy pork in aromatic honey and ginger. A pair of well-heeled Melbournians sought the safety of Pinot Grigio. Their waiter obliged with a by-the-glass example from Slovenia. By being imaginative, Cutler & Co's wine offering had taken the ubiquitous entry-level PG call and turned it into a vinous adventure in off-piste Eastern European quality wine.

cutlerandco.com.au

World in a glass

Who better to assess the opportunities for wines from Victoria than leading wine writers, commentators, critics and those tasked with selling them in Australia and the UK

When it comes to summing up Australia's state of Victoria, then Crowded House's Four Seasons in One Day quickly comes to mind. The sudden and diverse changes in the weather, coupled with the changing face of its landscape, is what singles out Victoria from all the other Australian states. It is also that diversity which helps make its wines so unique and why it has captured the imagination of so many observers and commentators on the Australian wine market. Here we turn to some of the most influential voices in the sector to cast their verdict on Victoria and what it means to them ■

Max Allen

"I am, of course, horribly biased, living in Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, but I do believe this state can boast the most extraordinary diversity of wine regions, from the hot inland irrigated regions up on the Murray River in the north west to the very chilly areas up on the slopes of Mount Macedon and the far south west coastal volcanic plains.



"So, without leaving the state, I can cater to every possible drinking occasion: from crisp, late-disgorged sparkling to ageworthy, fragrant Riesling; breezy Pinot Grigio; and complex, wheatmealy Chardonnay. Then to supple and foresty Pinot Noir; spicy, peppery Syrah; solid, chunky Shiraz; tangy, savoury Sangiovese and Nebbiolo; pitch-black Durif; stunning, late-harvested Riesling; unctuous rare Muscat and Tokay ... the world in a glass.

"It is possible to put a satisfyingly comprehensive wine list together and

make it entirely Victorian.

"Victoria does everything well. And the name of its state association, Wines of Victoria, says it all: the subtle but profound use of the plural signifies that this state is not just about one wine or style or region, but an amazing plurality of styles and regions.

"The best way for Victoria to promote its wines to the world would be to tie the state's grape-growing and winemaking activities in with the street-wise, switched-on and laid-back character of Melbourne's (and country Victoria's) food, art, wine and music scene - the globally-renowned inner-urban laneway bar culture; the thriving pub-band and new-folk tradition; the innovative craft, design and architecture movements; the film and theatre crucible giving birth to such a wealth of talent."

Wine writer

Jancis Robinson MW

"The Victorian wine map is more disjointed than that of any other Australian state. Of real interest to the fine wine drinker, however, are the vineyards in the southern half of the state, which is the coolest part of mainland Australia.

"The cloudy Yarra Valley has been making top-quality wine for a century and has earned itself a reputation for delicate Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays such as those from De Bortoli, Yering Station, Tarrawarra, Diamond Valley and Giant Steps, excellent sparkling wine at Domaine Chandon, and complex Cabernet from Yarra Yering and the historic Yeringberg estate.

"On the other side of Melbourne is Geelong, which has also shown an



aptitude for Pinot Noir in bottlings from Bannockburn by Farr and Scotchmans Hill, among others. And Melbourne can boast a third wine region on the Mornington Peninsula. A tight-knit group of small estates such as Dromana, Main Ridge, Stonier, Ten Minutes by Tractor and

T'Gallant have worked hard to promote the reputation of this cool climate wine region, which makes particularly crystalline Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

"Henty is the coolest of the three regions in western Victoria. Seppelt was the pioneer, Crawford River produces top-quality ageworthy Riesling and Tarrington has shown the region's potential for burgundian varieties.

"Great Western, an unofficial subregion of the Grampians, was also made famous by Seppelts.

"The high Pyrenees boast Redbank, Taltarni and Dalwhinnie's best bottles as evidence of this cool area's potential. Bendigo is much warmer, enabling Balgownie and others to produce sumptuous reds. Neighbouring Heathcote has a reputation for rich Shiraz. The Macedon Ranges can be almost too cool but not for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

"But one of Australia's great gifts to the wine world is to be found right up on the border with New South Wales, where Rutherglen and Glenrowan are sources of a unique style of rich fortified wines made from both a dark-skinned version of the best Muscat vine and from Muscadelle grapes, traditionally labelled Tokay here."

Wine writer, columnist

Matthew Jukes

"Victoria is the place to go in search of wines which are almost 'un-Australian' by nature. By that I mean that cool climate Shiraz abounds, Pinot is all over the place, fortifieds are based here and so on. Of course, the sun still shines, but there are as many oceanic influences in Victoria as there are mountains.



"The odd thing about Victoria is that the regions are distinct and scattered throughout the entire land mass.

"Victoria covers every style of wine, and often - and this is a gross generalisation - producers tend to have a more European structure to the wines, but still maintain an Aussie brightness of fruit.

"Highlights for me include Mornington's awesome Pinots, Yarra's Shiraz and Pinot, not forgetting Chardonnay and Beechworth's phenomenal but tiny output of boutique gems across all varieties and Rutherglen's Muscat and Tokays. But the odd thing is that Mount Langi Ghiran in Arrarat, Dalwhinnie in Moonambel, Best's Great Western in the Grampians, Tarrington and Crawford River in Henty and Mitchelton and Tahbilk in Nagambie Lakes are beacon-like producers in virtually one-horse towns. This is possibly unique in the wine world.

"Those best placed to do well are the

medium-sized boutique wineries whose wines are restaurant-friendly, on account of their lack of brawn and because of their nice clean lines and great value for money. But they also offer some degree of rarity and caché, so that independent retailers and restaurateurs can offer something the high

street can't. They don't need to change what they're doing as far as growing and winemaking is concerned, they just need to clarify the message and target it accurately.

"But it is the cool climate that is Victoria's point of difference. I know that other states have cool bits and everyone is trying to make cool wines, but Victoria has more than many and this message should be made loud and clear to educate European-driven-palate wine drinkers.

"There is still a need to try to imprint the regions and where they are on people's brains, but this has always been a challenge with Australia. It does, though, explain a lot when drinkers know where the wines come from like they do with more upmarket wines in Europe.

"Victorian estates should talk more about where they are based and not what the grapes used are or whatever. These are unique terroirs which, in the best

wines, directly reflect their soils and are therefore unique on the planet. Yarra Shiraz, for example, is a phenomenon which hasn't bitten yet. A red wine with a Pinot texture, but a Shiraz aroma.

"The Rhone can't even do this. It is commercial and immediately appealing and it is the region and its microclimate that is responsible for this and not the winemaker.

"Melbourne is Victoria's main market and it is a very European, cosmopolitan city. The world's great cities have more in common with Melbourne than any other Australian city - so it makes sense that we should embrace these wines.

"A four-pronged attack of foodiness/regional/quirkiness-rarity/value for money would work well. The industry won't do it, but wineries and the state government could and should.

"My choice for the top 10 well-known wineries would be: De Bortoli, PHI, Yering Station, Dalwhinnie, Mount Langi Ghiran, Tahbilk, Mitchelton, Campbell's, Giaconda and Stonier.

"And my secret squirrel (not very well known) top 10 wineries would be: William Downie, Gembrook Hill, Craiglee, Tarrington, Castagna, Main Ridge, Yabby Lake, Ten Minutes by Tractor, Paringa and Best's Great Western."

Wine writer, Daily Mail columnist and author of 100 Best Australian Wines

Stacey-Lee Edwards



"In Australian restaurants we break down our lists by region. It may be hard to do that here, but I think you

have to be strong and give it a go.

"That is the way we sell our Italian wines here at River Café and we do have a daunting wine list for some customers. But it encourages people to have a dialogue with the sommelier.

"It would be great to see the wines that smaller producers in Victoria are making over here, but I know how much demand there is for them in Australia.

You have to pitch Victorian wines at the more discerning wine drinker.

Head sommelier

River Café restaurant, London

Nick Stock

"No other state has such a convincing pack of winemakers. They are blazing a new agenda of terroir-driven, finely detailed wines and their stylistic inspiration and technique is drawn from years of first-hand encounters with western Europe's masters and their wines.

"The stylistic diversity of Victoria's wine is unmatched among other states. Sommeliers the world over can write an all-Victorian wine list without apology; from cool-climate sparkling, through all shades of white, pink, red and sweet table wine and into unique fortified elixir territory. There are no gaps to fill and only small bridges to build to connect these wines to euro-centric palates.

"The big issue has been that



domineering (largely) South Australian reds and structureless, fruity factory wines have trashed the broader image of Australian wine and, thankfully, we are in the midst of a correction.

"Victoria's most astute producers didn't follow that trail to hedonism. Instead, the most determined

have crafted globally relevant styles, hardwired deep into their place of origin. Victoria's fragrant dry Rieslings, focused, powerful Chardonnays, expressive suites of distinctive Pinot and perfumed Shiraz, are wines all perfectly positioned to reinstate Australia's standing as a highly-respected fine wine-producing nation."

Wine writer, author of the Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide

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- Mac Forbes Wines

Connect Wine 01629 640133

- Bird in Hand

Constellation Europe 01483 690064

- Banrock Station
- Barossa Valley Estate
- Bay of Fires
- Berri Estates
- Brookland Valley
- Château Reynella
- Hardys
- Houghton
- Leasingham
- Stonehaven
- Stowells
- Tintara
- Yarra Burn

Corney & Barrow 020 7265 2400

- The Lane Vineyard

Cumulus Wines Pty

+49 6362 3080 290

- Cumulus Wines

D&D Wines 01565 650952

- Bethany Wines Pty
- Haselgrove Wineries

De Bortoli Wines UK

01725 516467

- De Bortoli

Domaine Direct 020 7837 1142

- Leeuwin Estate

E&J Gallo Winery 01895 818008

- McWilliam's

Ehrmanns Wines 0207 418 1847

- Tahbilk

Enotria World Wine 020 8963 4239

- Mount Langi Ghiran
- Notley Gorge
- Parker Coonawarra Estate
- Peter Lehmann Wines
- Rosevear Estate
- Skillogalee
- Xanadu
- Yering Station

Fields, Morris & Verdin

020 78190 360

- Elderton Wines

Fortitude Wines 01903 889960

- O'Leary Walker Wines

Forth Wines 07990 803 679

- Leconfield

Foster's EMEA 020 8843 8411

- Annie's Lane
- Coldstream Hills
- Devil's Lair/Fifth Leg
- Lindemans
- Penfolds
- Rosemount
- Saltram
- Wolf Blass
- Wynns
- Yellowglen



UK importers directory

Great Western Wine

01225 322800

- Glaetzer Wines
- Heartland Wines
- Kooyong

H&H Bancroft 020 7232 5450

- Reschke Wines
- Schild Estate
- Ten Minutes by Tractor

Indage Wines 01536 446000

- Kangarilla Road

John E Fells 01442 289346

- Tyrrells

Justerini & Brooks 020 7493 6174

- Voyager Estate

Lanchester Wine Cellars 01207 521234

- McPherson Wines

Laytons 020 7288 8888

- Moss Wood

Liberty Wines 020 7720 5350

- Balnaves
- Charles Melton
- Clonakilla
- Cullen Wines
- Greenstone
- Grosset
- Innocent Bystander
- John Duval
- Mitolo
- Mount Horrocks
- Plantagenet
- SC Pannell
- Shaw and Smith
- William Downie
- Willunga 100

Louis Latour 020 7409 7276

- McHenry Hohnen

Matthew Clark

01275 891400

- Whirlpool Reach

Mentzendorff 020 7840 3600

- Turkey Flat

Mitton International Wines

+49 3024 045 919

- Hungerford Hill

Moët Hennessy 020 7235 9411

- Green Point
- Cape Mentelle

Negociants UK

01582 462859

- Heggies Vineyard
- Jansz
- Jim Barry
- mesh
- Oxford Landing
- Pewsey Vale Vineyard
- Redbank
- Ringbolt
- Smith and Hooper
- Vasse Felix
- Yalumba

New Generation Wines

01444 0248654

- Gemtree

Oddbins 020 8944 4400

- Whirlpool Reach

OW Loeb 020 7234 0385

- Crawford River
- Giant Steps

Off Piste Wines 01242 229634

- Casella Wines

Pernod Ricard UK

020 8538 4484

- Jacob's Creek
- Wyndham Estate

PLB 01342 318282

- Evans & Tate
- Geoff Merrill Wines
- Punt Road Wines
- Step Road Wines
- Sticks Yarra Valley
- Zilie Wines
- Zontes Footstep

Raisin Social 01883 731173

- Shingleback

Seckford Agencies 01206 23118

- Bremerton Vintners
- Coriole
- Hollick
- Pikes & Pikes and Joyce
- Trentham Estate

Stevens Garnier 01865 263300

- Willow Bridge Estate
- Wirra Wirra

Stratford's Wine Agencies

01628 810606

- Ferngrove
- Langmeil
- Paxton Wines
- Pertaringa
- Pirie Estate
- Tamburlaine
- Wakefield Wines

Swig 020 8995 7060

- Yabby Lake

We Love Fine Wine

01732 464100

- Kay Brothers

