

good living wine

Here's cheers to some of our best

Our winemakers have done themselves proud in the face of adversity.



HUON HOOKE

The year 2009 in wine has been a difficult one. It started with murderous bushfires in the Yarra Valley and ended with appalling statistics: we have a 100 million-case wine surplus and sales in key markets have slumped.

On top of that, Kiwi sauvignon blanc continues to be the favoured tittle of Australians and it's causing angst on both sides of the Tasman. On our side, because the fall in Australian chardonnay sales has seen an almost bottle-for-bottle rise in NZ sauvignon blanc; across the Tasman, the Kiwis are paranoid the boom will stop abruptly, like all fashions, and they'll be left holding the baby.

Somehow, Australian winemakers kept producing some superb wines. It's just a pity the rest of the world seems not to notice. Here is my pick of the year's best:

PINOT NOIR

2008 Bindi Block 5 Pinot Noir, Macedon Ranges, \$95
Bindi's Michael Dhillon is one of our most thoughtful winemakers, dedicated to crafting great pinot noir. Block 5 is his dearest wine but all the '08 Bindi's are superb. Block 5 is also the most structured and profound, promising to cellar the longest. Its aroma is very rich, of sweet black cherry and spices with a hint of oak. In the mouth it's expansive and deep, big for a pinot with substantial tannin and needs more time to hit its straps than its siblings the Composition (\$52) and the Original Vineyard (\$79). A majestic pinot to keep another year and drink for at least 10 years after that. 96/100.



SHIRAZ

2008 Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier, Canberra District, \$95
The '08 vintage was a great one for Canberra and heralded another outstanding shiraz viognier from Clonakilla: an effortlessly elegant, beautifully balanced wine of real refinement. It has meaty, spicy and red-fruit aromas with a lick of nicely judged oak and is medium- to full-bodied and fine-boned in structure. It's a wine of grace rather than one of muscle and measures right up to the high mark winemaker Tim Kirk sets himself. Drink from now to 15 years. 96/100.

CABERNET

2004 Lesauvin Estate Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon, Margaret River, \$59
Great red wines take time. The best need years to show their worth, they cellar long-term and build and evolve as they mature. This is not a fruity cab for instant gratification. It's built for the long haul. Released at more than five years old, it's youthful and reserved. It needs to be coaxed by swirling, sniffing and exercising patience; the palate is powerful and structured. It's rich, fleshy, concentrated and profound, with a big finish and tremendous length. Drink for 25 years. 95/100.

GRENADE BLEND

2006 John Duval Pinus Shiraz Grenache Mourvedre, Maroon Valley, \$39
Grenache blends are arguably the best-value Australian red wine but don't get the recognition they deserve. Former Penfolds chief winemaker John Duval makes one of the best. The '06 is a cracker, from a top vintage. Its delicious sweet-fruit and floral aromas announce a wine of real class. The palate is full and rich with soft, light tannins and serious length. Drink for six-plus years. 95/100.

ALTERNATIVE VARIETIES

2004 Freeman Rondinella Corvina, Hilltops, \$39
Low-yielding grapes from Brian Freeman's vineyard in the arid Hilltops region were further concentrated by air-drying to give an individual interpretation of Italy's Amarone style. The aromas are of dried cherry and dried plum, with some dry herb high notes and a whiff of mint. It's dense and concentrated to taste, with mouth-coating but ripe, supple tannins that persist throughout the long palate. This is a beautifully structured, deep wine with lots of personality and a touch of mystery. Now to 10, perhaps 15, years. 94/100.

CHARDONNAY

2007 Cullen Kevin John Chardonnay, Margaret River, \$75

Smoky, toasty oak and lees-marked aromas build more and more grapefruit and stone-fruit as you sip. It manages to combine power with finesse, the flavour very deep and persistent with elegance and complexity. I've seen it beside many a top-flight burgundy and while the quality lacks nothing in comparison, it always has more fruit – a style rather than a value judgment. Exciting wine indeed. Now to six years. 95/100.

SEMILLON

2005 Brokenwood Brycefield & Belford Vineyards Semillon, Hunter Valley, \$36
Waxy, lanolin, herbal and mineral aromas rocket from the glass, with a trace of buttered toast from the

beginnings of bottle-age. This is a stunning, semi-mature, traditional-style Hunter semillon with an amazingly youthful and lively palate presence. Drink for 10-plus years. 96/100.

RIESLING

2007 Frogmore Creek Riesling, Tasmania, \$24
Minerally aromas, shy and reserved, palate very nervy and taut with refreshing qualities and very long flavour. Now to 10 years. 95/100.

SEMILLON SAUVIGNON BLANC

2009 Hazlebin Bay Semillon Sauvignon Blanc, Margaret River, \$22
Delicate, restrained and very fine wine with regional snow-poa and lemon/citrus aromas. 94/100.

ALTERNATIVE VARIETIES

2008 d'Arenberg The Last Ditch Viognier, Adelaide Hills & McLaren Vale, \$19
Oyster-shell leesy aromas over honey, subtle apricot and a hint of toasted nut from oak. Rich, round but light and retains some subtlety. 93/100.

RUSSELL

2008 Arras Pinot Noir Chardonnay, Tasmania, \$75
Mature, complex buttery nose with meaty pinot notes; rich, soft, layered palate. 94/100.

SWEET WINE

2007 Josef Chromy Botrytis Riesling, Tasmania, \$26/375ml
Ultra-fine, delicate, botrytis-affected but not especially sweet. Refreshing rather than cloying. 94/100.

VALUE BUYS

- [] 2008 Yalumba Y Series Shiraz Viognier, South Australia, \$13.
- [] 2009 Printhie Mountain Range Sauvignon Blanc, Orange, \$17.
- [] 2008 Brookland Valley Verse 1 Chardonnay, Margaret River, \$20.
- [] 2007 Rosiny Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Margaret River, \$23.