

Wine 100 Australia's Leading Independent Wine Guide

True to Terrior

Brokenwood Hunter Valley Semillon 2009
Brokenwood ILR Semillon 2004

February 2010



WINE 100 14 February 2010 **Semillon**

True to Terrior

Penny Boothman

Semillon is a versatile grape, and one that can take on any number of different roles in wine—both star performer in a single varietal or crowd scene wine in a multi-grape blend—depending on where it's grown and what it ends up sharing a bottle with.

In the variety's homeland of Bordeaux, France, it is traditionally used for blending and makes up varying amounts of both dry and sweet white wine styles. However, its most celebrated incarnation in Australia is as the highly regarded and seemingly overvalued star Semillon of the Hunter Valley. This early-picked, oak-aged style remains globally unique, the true intersection of grape and terrior in the Hunter Valley. Semillon produces a lean, pale-coloured wine with citrus and fatty flavours when young. Over a few years in bottle, however, it develops a honeyed, fluffy, complex depth of flavour. Celebrated names such as Tyrrell's, McWilliams and Brokenwood, among others, produce wines here in the classic style and several younger wineries are also gaining significant acclaim.

The challenging acidity of aged Hunter Valley Semillon may be something of an acquired taste for novice wine drinkers and it's a wine that's generally considered best matched with food. But the same grape is partly responsible for some of the most accessible, crowd-pleasing, aperitif-style gluggers in the wine trade. Semillon is one of the multibonus and multitalented \$58 and \$85 blends a usual on a

softening and body and glass-boosting element to provide substance to Sauvignon Blanc's uplifting aromatics. Semillon also makes (alone or with help from good old Sauvignon Blanc or even a little Muscadet) some of the world's favourite sweet wines, being a grape that is helpfully naturally susceptible to the botrytis fungus infection. Brokenwood makes Sauternes wines, for example, are predominantly crafted from this reliable sugar producer. In an interesting parallel to the long-lived vines of the Hunter Valley, these are some of the most reliably age-worthy white wine created.

Drunk young, sweet Semillon can taste lush and delicious, but when made and aged to full maturity it seems an infinite spectrum of secondary

wines and flavours appear. De Bortoli's Noble One is probably Australia's most internationally celebrated dessert style Semillon. Every vintage of this wine is quality laden with trophies and medals and the 2007 vintage in fact marks the 25th anniversary release of this iconic wine. This, and many of Australia's other great sweet botrytised wines come with the warm, peachy characters of the Riverina in New South Wales.

Semillon is an unusual grape in that, even when vinified dry, it can be found in all styles from the leanly acidic and citrus to the fatty and frothy depending on when the grapes are picked and when the wine is intended to be drunk. Semillon is also one of the very best grapes for revealing and highlighting the different characters that can be found in Australia's varied wine regions. It would be difficult to continue Semillon vines from two different regions, when treated sympathetically in the winery it produces an unlikely accurate representation of the terrior it has been grown in.

Semillon has a royal following in Barossa Valley, for example, where it produces some of its most succulent wines—both for young drinking fresh after vintage and medium to long ageing in the cellar. Barossa Semillons are typically deeper yellow in colour than most Hunter or Margaret River examples, with low amounts of peaches and mangoes. A note of vanilla is also often perceptible as Barossa Semillons are frequently treated to a period of barrel-aging. The organic Semillon producer in these parts is of course Peter Lehmann Wines, with the cult status Margaret River Semillon—a wine that is held back for five years before release—the pinnacle of the winery's white wine production.

Head to Western Australia and you'll find that Margaret River's exemplar style is a balance between the Hunter and Barossa styles, and here you're more likely to find a

little—or a lot—of Sauvignon Blanc in the blend. Wines such as Voyager Estate's Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon and Mass Wood's Semillon and the Strabon Vale Vineyard Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc look the same. Margaret River styles are wines that will generally age well, but are equally approachable as young wines.

Whatever your preferred style of white wine, somewhere in Australia there's likely to be a Semillon to suit your palate.

40 years of Brokenwood

October 2010 will see Brokenwood Wines celebrate its 40th birthday. James Halliday, John Beeskin and Tony Albert were the successful bidder over Hungertail Hill for the 10-acre block just up from the intersection of Scale Road and McDonalds

Drive. The time between then and the first grapes (and wine) appearing in 1973 was spent clearing and planting what was basically a scrub block of iron bark (and spoked gum on bushy ordinary soil).

Resistance paid off: at the 40th party over the October long weekend will feature veterans of the iconic Growyard vineyard Shiraz, ILR Reserve Semillon and Hill Shiraz, along with an attempt to open a bottle of every wine made since 1973. To help the party, post holders have been mailed back to the Hunter Valley, including winemakers Matt Heron, Dan Orwin, Fiona Furnell, Richard Zasko and the many vintage staff that dragged a hose and went on to bigger and better things. These include Andrew Calvert, Caroline Dunn, Tamara Grealy, Freya Hahnan, Dave Macintosh, Matt Warwick and Sarah-Kate Dieren to name a few.

A good time? You bet.

Semillon February 2010 **WINE 100**

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BROKENWOOD
AUSTRALIAN CRAFT AT ITS FINEST

Hunter Semillon, a national treasure with no true equivalent anywhere in Australia or overseas. A unique wine which has the amazing ability to evolve from a fresh, crisp citrus wine to a honey, toasted, delicious aged great wine to age.

2009 Hunter Valley Semillon
95 points, James Halliday
91 points, Nick Buxton

2004 ILR Reserve Semillon
95 points, James Halliday
96 points, Ian Hunter
94 points, Josh Reynolds

www.brokenwood.com.au

Brokenwood Hunter Valley Semillon | Vintage 2009 RRP \$20 93

TS: A perennial bargain, and on fine form in 2009, this summer quaffer has enough charm to leave any Sauvignon addict begging for another glass. With pristine lemon fruit, nuances of nutmeg and a delightfully crisp finish, it's got it all going for it. www.brokenwood.com.au



Brokenwood ILR Reserve Hunter Valley Semillon | Vintage 2004 RRP \$45 95

TS: This is the wine to drink while you're waiting for the Belford to come around; it's beautifully mature and ready to go. The full spectrum of Semillon flavours are here: lime, lemon and apple, through cut grass and lanolin to the aged complexity of spice, roast nuts and wild honey. www.brokenwood.com.au

