

Great Value from Down Under

The fine art of Australian viniculture



In less than fifteen years, Australia has come from virtually nowhere as a source of quality table wine to the point where, today, the world is being swamped by a veritable tsunami of Australian wines. Australia is a diverse geographical entity. Generally, the prime wine-growing regions are scattered just inland from the coastline in the southeastern corner of the country. The regions near the ocean offer a cooler climate; while further inland, the climate is warmer.

There is still a widespread belief that blending across regions, grape varieties, and vineyards enables more consistent high quality than a single-vineyard philosophy.

Australia's signature luxury wine, Penfolds Grange, is the classic example as it's a blend of vineyards that can span up to six regions across South Australia. But Australians are slowly coming to understand the concept of regional appellations. A boost to both producer and consumer, recent legislation has delineated wine zones and guaranteed authenticity of origin.

Shiraz (the variety most of the rest of the world call Syrah) is by far the most widely planted wine grape, producing about a quarter of the entire harvest each year. Cabernet Sauvignon does well in some regions but overall has lost popularity because the buzz is all about Shiraz. Several other red grapes excel in Australia—Grenache is coming on strong, both by itself and in blends with Shiraz and often Mourvedre. Chardonnay is the country's most widely planted white variety.

Other popular white grapes include Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, and Viognier.

The sweet spot for good value from Australia is in the \$15 to \$45 range. This is where the largest number of wines that taste like they ought to cost a whole lot more than they do are found. Some are brands designed by gigantic multinationals (eighty per cent of Australian wine exported is in the hands of the so-called 'Big Four'). The phenomenal success of Australian wine exports worldwide wasn't a fluke; in 1993, the Australian wine industry agreed on a plan to boost wine production and worldwide sales 128 per cent by the year 2010. That goal was achieved before 2000.

There are those who fear that such excess wine production could cheapen the image of Australia as a quality wine producer. Winemakers, however, see this situation differently. They opine that the extra fruit will give them the luxury of being more selective with quality, which allows for more expression and gives consumers a wider choice of individualistic wines. The next ten years promise to be very exciting as Australia's wine industry forges ahead.

Some of the wines offering great value are: White—CSPC 557934 McWilliam's 2003 Hanwood Estate Chardonnay \$17 and CSPC 574962 Tyrrell 1997 Vat 1 Hunter Semillon \$45; Reds—CSPC 583146 Rosemount 2001 GSM (Grenache-Syrah-Mourvedre) \$32. Torbreck 2002 The Juveniles (Grenache-Shiraz-Mourvedre) \$45, and CSPC 713798 Wolf Blass 2003 Grey Label Cabernet Sauvignon \$35.

—Peter Blattmann

A regular contributing writer to *Calgary Living* magazine, Peter Blattmann's full-time duties include conducting gastronomic tours of renowned culinary centers and famous wine regions throughout the world. More information on these pursuits can be found at his website: www.gourmet-experience.com

Cellar Notes

Penfolds
2002 RWT Shiraz
 CSPC 564278, \$130 GST included.

This super-premium Shiraz is made from one hundred per cent Barossa fruit. It is a lush mouthful of seductive, dark berried fruit and spice flavours that remain zingy through the impressive, lingering finish. This notable wine is layered, long, and luscious with excellent aging potential.