

Australia's good earth

Our second write-up in the series digs deep to uncover Down Under's premium bottles.

By June Lee



ACCORDING to the most recent Wine Australia report in July 2013, Australia ranks fourth among the world's 10 biggest wine exporters in the average value per litre of bottled wine exports, behind New Zealand, France and the US but ahead of Argentina, Italy, South Africa, Germany and Chile.

Singapore garnered a mention in this report, as having the second highest number of exporters with 280, ahead of the UK (273), Canada (253) and USA (226).

No surprise there, as Singapore has long enjoyed the affordable fruits of the Australian wine industry. However, what may surprise long-time drinkers is the modern fine winemaking approach of today's producers, resulting in progressive strides in quality.

Jancy Tan, business development manager from Parklands Fine Food and Wine, has noticed the trend over the years, and explains: "These vineyards we chose (Kooyong, Moorooduc and Tim Smith) are very small producers and are owned by people who

wish to make the best their region can offer. These are examples of the handcrafted wines that are often overlooked when people think of Australian wines. The wines are linked to the winemakers' DNA, as you can see with the thumb print on Tim Smith's wine."

Agrees chief judge of the BT Wine Challenge, Lim Hwee Peng, CSW, FWS: "Gone are the days of the 'sunshine in a glass' approach in crafting wines from Down Under." He singles out cool climate Chardonnay that offers controlled mineral notes and complexity, as well as delicate, steely, bone-dry Riesling that yet exhibits fresh and lemony flavour. However, he saves the ultimate praise for Cabernet Sauvignon: "Increasingly, wines from Coonawarra and Margaret River are occupying my cellar. I'm running out of storage space as these bottles are 'living' longer than the allocated cellar spots!"

On that note, we present the nine wines selected from Australia – the largest number from a single New World country in this inaugural Business Times Wine Challenge, presented by UBS.

Next week: Italy

Chatsfield Riesling 2012

Price: \$60

Retail: Contact Merchants of Singapore at 6222 1162 or email info@merchantsofsingapore.com.sg

WHERE exactly is the Great Southern in Australia located? This coolest of West Australia's wine-growing regions is roughly 350km southeast from Perth, with its wine industry taking off commercially since the 1980s.

Within the Great Southern is the inland Mount Barker sub-region, distinguished by its gravel loams called marri that promote good drainage and low fertility. A cool temperate climate encourages a riesling style that is elegant, complex and concentrated, and which is fast catching up to better known Clare and Eden Valley Rieslings.

Considered one of the oldest vineyards in the Great Southern, establishing its first Riesling and Gewürztraminer vines in 1976, was Waterman Wines – now known as Chatsfield and under different hands. Chatsfield derives its name from a local bird known as chat that made its home among the vines, helpfully eating insects. In fact, as part of its long-term aim to have organic management of the vineyard, sheep and cows are grazed to maintain weed and grasses, while guinea fowl roam freely for additional insect control.

Tasting notes: The crisp nose opens with aromas of red apple, lime and white flowers. The expressive palate is forward with lemon and spicy minerality, with natural acidity guiding the long, clean finish.



Moorooduc Estate Chardonnay 2011

Price: \$48 (minimum 12 bottles)

Retail: Contact Parklands Fine Food and Wine at 9797 9178 or email jancy@austwineexporters.com

AU naturel winemaking techniques are practised at this family-run, boutique winery in the Mornington Peninsula. Chickens and ducks and even a stray peacock are part of the family at Moorooduc Estate.

Getting stellar results from unpredictable wild yeast fermentation is a tricky business, but Dr Richard McIntyre is the man for the task. A surgeon in his previous profession, McIntyre has applied his skill to crafting terroir driven wines with a nod to Burgundy. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are the stars in the Moorooduc sub-region of Mornington, just an hour's drive from Melbourne's CBD.

At the McIntyre Vineyard where the fruit from this Chardonnay is sourced, all grapes are hand harvested, with whole bunch pressing and natural malolactic fermentation in barrel. Just 700 cases are produced from this vintage, which is said to be one of the more successful.

If cajoling indigenous yeast to work in the winery isn't arduous enough, Dr McIntyre is also a noted baker, having even built a wood-fired oven to bake his famous sourdough bread.

Tasting Notes: Pale lemon in colour with lemon and grapefruit citrus on the nose and palate. There's concentration, roundedness and depth, with hints of hazelnut and white nectarine.



Tim Smith Shiraz 2010

Price: \$60 (minimum 12 bottles)

Retail: Contact Parklands Fine Food and Wine at 9797 9178 or email jancy@austwineexporters.com

THE former cellar hand at Yalumba winery in 1987 has since become one of the best known names in Australian wines. The signature thumbprint of approval on his labels is not just a marketing tool; Adelaide native Tim Smith doesn't release vintages in years where the quality doesn't meet his standards.

Mr Smith's prowess in carefully sourcing wines from 20- to 100-year-old vines is what sets apart his small batch production of 250-500 cases. The Barossa Shiraz comprises fruit from six vineyards on the Barossa Valley floor: Eden Valley, Tanunda, Seppeltsfield, Nuriootpa, Kalimna and Light Pass, each highlighting the regionality of the vilage, soil, and range in elevation.

As a declared huge fan of the wines of Bandol, Mr Smith draws stylistic inspiration from the Southern Rhone for plush fruit and his own blend of MGS – Mataro, Grenache and Shiraz; Mataro being the Spanish synonym for French Mourvedre.

Tasting notes: Medium bodied with powdery tannins and balance that will carry for a good few years. The attractive aromas of blackberry, pepper, cherry, spice and vanilla reveal a deeper core of plums, cloves and red fruit, with bright acidity to lighten the mouthfeel.



Yalumba The Cigar 2011

Price: \$60

Retail: Contact Monopole at 6554 3680 or email info@monopole.com.sg

YALUMBA is a 164-year-old, sixth generation family owned winery – and the only one in Australia to boast its own on-site cooperage (crafting of oak barrels).

As legend has it, Dorset-born brewer Samuel Smith and his son Sidney planted the first vines by moonlight in the Barossa Valley in South Australia. Yalumba took its name from the Aboriginal word for "all the land around". From an initial 30 acres in 1849, Smith gradually expanded his range of old bush vine Grenache, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon which thrive in the Barossa region.

The Cigar, however, is an expression of 100 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon from their Coonawarra vineyard, purchased in 1993. The estate is named The Menzies Estate vineyards, and the wine derives its celebratory name from the unique cigar-shaped strip of world-famous terra rossa soil which defines the Coonawarra wine region. Literally meaning "red earth", the rich soil over limestone with a maritime climate provides ideal growing conditions for Cabernet.

Tasting notes: Plush fruit character marks this mature and well-handled Cab, which opens with heady aromas of cherries and dark chocolate with a touch of dried sage. There's great length from the lively acid and fine emery tannins, finishing soft and supple.



Mitolo Jester Shiraz 2010

Price: \$50

Retail: Crystal Wines, #01-02/03 Valley Point, 491 River Valley Road. Tel: 6737 3540

THE famous Syrah of Rhone may have found its match in the mighty Shiraz from McLaren Vale. Just 35km south of Adelaide, McLaren Vale enjoys a maritime Mediterranean climate that has encouraged grape cultivation for over 170 years. Thin soils, limited source of water and long warm summer days produce complex Shiraz with true expressions of berry, chocolate and licorice characters.

Adelaide native Frank Mitolo has his horticultural roots to thank for his interest in viticulture. From marketing farm produce such as potatoes and onions, to making wines as a hobby, he finally joined the fray of boutique wineries in the McLaren Vale region with his eponymous vineyard in 1999. The Lopresti holding near the coastal town of Port Willunga spent its past life as an almond orchard, and hosts 30-year-old vines.

His first signature wine in 2000 was dubbed the G.A.M Shiraz, named after his children – Gemma, Alex and Marco. While the G.A.M is made for long-term cellaring, the Jester range (nicknamed the "baby G.A.M") represents earlier drinking pleasure. The 2010 year is one to watch, with early season rainfall after some years of drought, and mild days that allowed good acid development.

Tasting notes: The lively and stylish Jester welcomes drinkers with a deep garnet red colour in the glass. Blackberry, licorice and dark plum bouquet is backed by spicy blackberry fruits with lingering savoury anise and sarsaparilla flavours. Ideal to drink now.



Kooyong Estate Pinot Noir 2010

Price: \$70 (minimum 12 bottles)

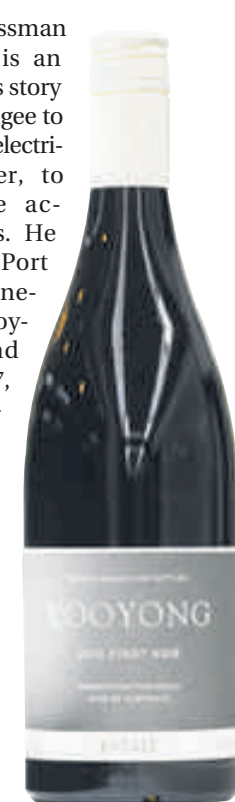
Retail: Contact Parklands Fine Food and Wine at 9797 9178 or email jancy@austwineexporters.com

RETIRED businessman Giorgio Gjergja is an Australian success story – from Italian refugee to multi-millionaire electrical manufacturer, to owner of three acclaimed wineries. He first purchased Port Phillip Estate vineyard in 2000, Kooyong in 2004, and Ballewindi in 2007, all in the Mornington Peninsula region.

What truly excites Kooyong's fans are the biological farming methods and non-interventionist winemaking philosophies employed by winemaker Sandro Mosele. Although labour intensive and also somewhat nerve-racking, the winery hand prunes, shoot thins and hand harvests every fruit, as well as wild ferments all wines without fining. In addition, all reds are not filtered. This makes a significant contribution to the expressiveness, individuality and unique natural elegance of the final product.

Kooyong is planted to 40 hectares of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris, with the earliest grapes dating from 1996. Sand, loam and clay are the principal composition of the soil, though some ironstone add firmness and masculinity while siliceous influence imparts minerality. The Kooyong Estate Pinot Noir, as the name suggests, is a single estate blend.

Tasting notes: A good vintage wine, the 2010 is deep purplish-maroon, with a youthful yet harmonious nose of cranberry, raspberry and savoury red cherry. The palate is medium-bodied and framed by structured tannins over a core of red fruit before finishing savoury and long.



Pierro Chardonnay 2011

Price: \$135

Retail: Bacchus, #B1-13 Paragon Shopping Centre, 290 Orchard Road. Tel: 6734 4844

A DOCTOR'S prescription for innovation turned this boutique winery into one of Australia's finest Chardonnay producers.

Though with a young history, Margaret River is known for producing serious, Burgundian Chardonnays with fine balance and minerality. In 1980, Perth native Dr Michael Peterkin established Pierro in Wilyabrup and set about implementing canopy management, controlled use of irrigation and high-density planting practices in his quest to create a world-class white.

His sloping site now comprises three blocks of Chardonnay, of which 95 per cent is the Gin Gin clone that has proved successful in Margaret River. The vineyards maximise fruit, leaf and cane exposure to sunlight, with laterite gravel and granite soil that offer great root penetration.

The 2011 early picked harvest is said to be one of the most outstanding, based on one of the driest and warmest summers on record. And the ageing potential of this Chardonnay continues to improve, with phenolic content lowered by whole bunch pressing, greater attention to levels of dissolved oxygen and sulphur dioxide during processing, and the use of screwcaps to better protect from oxidation.

Tasting notes: Opulent yet refined, the mouthfeel is enticing and creamy before its tight structure leads to a refreshing, zesty finish. There are delicate nutty characters and schisty minerally notes that give complexity and a more savoury flavour profile.



Mount Langi Ghiran Cliff Edge Shiraz 2010

Price: \$65

Retail: Contact Top Wines at 6468 3866 or email sales@topwines.com.sg

THE first Shiraz cuttings arrived in the Grampians 150 years ago with Swiss immigrants prospecting for gold. It turned out that this pre-phyloxera Rhone clone adapted well to the cool climate, producing enduring spicy pepper characteristics and luscious fruit with fine tannins. Cuttings from the old block, made in 1981, are now the backbone of the Cliff Edge Shiraz; and in typical Aussie slang, it's nicknamed the "Baby Langi".

Mount Langi Ghiran winery takes its name from the Aboriginal language; it means "home of the yellow-tailed black cockatoo". Established in 1963, the winery since 2002 has belonged to the Rathbone family, making it part of the same group as Yering Station and Xanadu Estate. At least 80 per cent of its output is Shiraz, amounting to about 700 tonnes.

The sustainably managed vineyard uses a holistic approach to prevent pests, in addition to protecting the integrity of the ancient granite topsoils. Harvesting is done by a mixture of hand and machines, and interestingly fermentation includes some treading by foot. The 2010 harvest saw a dry, warm summer which encouraged a longer ripening period and built excellent grape maturity.

Tasting notes: Deep purple hues and dense purple rim indicate the meaty fruit intensity. Dark cherry and hints of roasted coffee on the nose is interwoven with spice and pepper character, supported by fine grained tannins for length and complexity.



Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon 2010

Price: \$165

Retail: The Oaks Cellars, #01-03/04/05 Orchard Parade Hotel, 1 Tanglin Road. Tel: 6836 0811

THE story of Margaret River is deeply tied to its three pioneering, fine quality wineries: Vasse Felix (1967), Moss Wood (1970) and Cullen Wines (1971). Bill Pannell of Moss Wood debuted his first Cabernet Sauvignon in 1973, and began winning accolades almost immediately. The winery's reputation grew exponentially again after 1985, when newlyweds Claire and Keith Mugford brought over the vineyard.

As chief winemaker, Keith brought a raft of innovations, from re-trellising to soil conservation, including deep cultivation, the use of cover crops, minimum tillage and mulching. In the winery, he added Cabernet Franc (5 per cent), Petit Verdot (5 per cent) and a splash of Merlot to the signature Left Bank-style Cabernet Sauvignon. The pricing of the Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon reflects its long cellaring potential, and those who invested in the 2001 should be comfortably enjoying that stellar vintage around now. The original Moss Wood vineyard, covering 10 hectares in Wilyabrup, couldn't keep up with the demand for its reds, and so the Mugfords bought nearby Ribbon Vale vineyard in 2000.

Tasting notes: Though aged for two years in barrel, oak characters are toasty and don't dominate. Ripe fruit aromas show violets and redcurrants, which carry over into the rich, sweet front and mid-palate. Concentrated mouthfeel, lively acidity and fine tannins sustain its complexity, and Moss Wood confidently predicts this wine will cellar for 25 years and drink at its prime after seven years.



The inaugural **The Business Times Wine Challenge 2013** in partnership with UBS seeks to uncover the top 50 wines available in Singapore. A distinguished panel of CEOs will choose the 10 best-drinking among them – decisions which will be announced in September. A unique buyer's guide to all 50 wines, reflecting the palate of Singapore's business elite, will be compiled from a series to be published in *The Business Times*. For more information, visit btinvest.com.sg/wine