



Australia's Victoria and Tasmania And Now for Something Completely Different

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Like a lot of Gen Xs, I was a great fan of the Monty Python television series. You had to love the trippy nature of the show, the seeming randomness of the plots in which the most unlikely things/people could land in the middle of a parochial set-up at anytime. And yet there was a thread of undeniable logic to it all. My trip around Victoria and Tasmania in March / April 2010 could have made a great Monty Python episode. All that was missing between each visit and large-scale tasting was John Cleese in a pink bikini announcing my next adventure: "And now for something completely different."

If the disparate parts of Victoria and Tasmania do appear comically idiosyncratic at times, it is only partly down to experimental nature of the settlers. The lay of the land that composes Australia's southern most states can be equally capricious and this is the basis of the logic behind the vast range of grapes and styles that are produced here. Everything from the country's finest sparkling wines to its greatest fortifieds is made within these territories. If you're wondering how, well consider that from Hobart, Tasmania to the top of Victoria's Rutherglen region covers about 800 kilometers as the crow flies – a good 200 km more than the distance between France's Champagne region and Banyuls in the Roussillon.

And then there's the wonderful collection of strong-willed characters that have migrated to Victoria and Tassie. It's as if all the winemakers that could no longer adhere to corporate conglomerate life found their spiritual home in the cooler, wilder frontiers of the south. As such, while South Australia produces considerably more wine than Victoria by virtue of a handful of massive wine headquarters there, Victoria is in fact home to more wineries. Most of these are small to medium sized producers, focusing on forging wines that represent both their lands and individual visions.

Because Victoria and Tasmania are so all over the place in terms of grapes and wine styles, the region must be the bane of wine marketers grappling for a snappy, summarizing catch-phrase. Perhaps this is also part of the reason these areas have been pretty much ignored by many large importers. You can almost see bossy Miss Brand Australia wagging a finger at these rebels, telling them that they must find a stylistic



focus and stick with it in order to be commercially successful. But that these regions can't be so easily pigeon-holed is what makes them extraordinary. I must re-stress to readers that it is not so much that all these winemakers cannot agree – it's more that there is such a vast range of soils and climates across these areas that a handful of one-size-fits-all wines would not work.

If I had to choose generally the most exciting wine styles emerging from these areas at the moment, they'd have to be the cooler climate Shirazes from Victoria and the Sparkling wines from Tasmania. I give Heathcote producers a particular pat on the back here – there's some first-rate Shirazes emerging from some very special pockets in this region these days. There are also some stunning Chardonnay's from Victoria that are achieving more finesse and elegance than ever, though in some attempts to achieve the lighter alcohol and body through early harvesting there are some lean, green efforts to be wary of. And there are some delightful varietal anomalies to report, too. Look out for Yarra Yering's Portuguese varieties and Merlot, Giaconda's Nebbiolo, Hoddle's Creek's Pinot Blanc, Castagna's Sangiovese and Domaine A's Tasmanian Cabernet in the report to follow. Pinot Noirs continue to sprout-up all over the regions but were generally a source of disappointment for this Pinot lover. But then this is perhaps in part due to the relative youth of many of the vineyards not to mention the recent spate of warmer vintages...

"In the last 10 years Central Victoria has received less water than Alice Springs," David Anderson of Wild Duck Creek Estate in Heathcote informed me when I asked him to comment on the trials of recent vintages. In short, 2007 and 2008 were warm to hot and desperately dry throughout much of Victoria. This meant that precious water rations had to be strategically applied to the irrigated vineyards (there are some brave dry-grown sites) at just the right time to keep the vines from shutting-down. If the 2007 drought and high temperatures weren't bad enough, then devastating bushfires swept across parts of the Yarra Valley, nearly taking out historic wineries such as Yarra Yering and causing irreparable smoke taint damage to some producers' wines. 2008 largely allowed for not only a bushfire reprieve for the region, but winter rains replenished the soils giving many Victorian vineyards the wherewithal to go on and make decent wines. In fact things were proceeding just fine in 2008 with most of the whites harvested and looking fine¹/₄and then a crippling heat-wave hit in March leaving the red vines gasping for respite. So for reds the relative merits of 2008 over 2007 is on a vineyard by vineyard basis, with a split in consensus amongst Victorian winemakers as to which was their favored vintage in terms of quality. Then in 2009 the bushfires returned with a vengeance. Worst affected were much of the Yarra Valley and parts of Heathcote. Some Yarra producers made little or no 2009 wines due to smoke taint damage. Apart from



this it was, generally speaking, a warm to hot growing season with some dangerous heat spikes that needed to be managed, but there are some very good Victorian 2009 reds about to be released.

2007 may have presented a heat-wave across South Australia and Victoria, but it was a relatively cool, late ripening vintage in Tasmania. 2008 was another story. It was a fairly warm vintage for Tassie, significantly earlier than 2007 and with alcohol levels uncharacteristically high in some parts, making for some great reds in 2008, though the whites and sparklings in 2007 are perhaps just a little finer.

The recent vintages have thrown a whole range of trials and challenges particularly at Victoria's wineries and yet a good number of the highest quality producers have still managed to forge exceptional wines that are *something completely different* to anything you can find elsewhere in Australia, or anywhere else for that matter. I hope you enjoy seeking out and drinking some of these wines as much as I enjoyed tasting them!

—Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW



Brokenwood

2008 Brokenwood Pinot Noir Beechworth

88

The 2008 Pinots are very well made but perhaps the heat spikes in 2008 robbed them of that extra finesse. Giving a pale ruby color, the 2008 Pinot Noir has pretty wild cherry and raspberry aromas with a suggestion of moss and dried mint. There's a good amount of pure, straightforward berry fruit on the palate countered by crisp acidity and a low to medium level of fine tannins. The finish is long yet a little simple. Drink it now to 2015.

Chambers Rosewood

NV Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Grand Muscadelle (Tokay)

96

The NV Rosewood Vineyards Grand Muscadelle gives a very deep brown color with a hint of green in the rim. Revealing an alluring nose of treacle (molasses), toasted walnut, dried mulberries, Christmas pudding, dark chocolate, preserved mandarin peel and espresso, this is an incredibly rich and thick mouthful with a great backbone of fresh acidity to enliven. The finish goes on and on delivering a whole pantry of dried fruit and spice flavors. Who needs crumbly old dessert when you have nectar like this?

NV Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Rare Muscadelle (Tokay)

98

The NV Rosewood Vineyards Rare Muscadelle has a deep brown color with a hint of green in the rim. The nose has a complex, oxidative, almost oloroso character giving notes of roasted walnuts, dark chocolate, burnt coffee and toffee. The palate is so crisp in acidity that the unbelievable level of sweetness and viscosity is infinitely drinkable. Layer upon layer of spice and nut flavors develop into the very long finish.

NV Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Tokay

92

Medium gold in color, the NV Rosewood Vineyards Muscadelle has gorgeous aromas of preserved peach slices drizzled with honey plus nuances of fading orange blossom, cinnamon stick and a dash of powdered ginger. The palate is very sweet, very rich and incredibly viscous with a pleasantly perfumed taste of Turkish delight coming through. Crisp acidity gives this opulent wine lift throughout the very long layered finish. This wine is such an incredible value that I had to ask the importer twice to confirm the price!

NV Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Grand Muscat

93

With a medium brown color going slightly green at the edge, NV Rosewood Vineyards Grand Muscat has aromas of macerated sultanas, fig paste, baklava, toasted hazelnuts and coffee grounds plus a little mace. The palate is very sweet and very crisp with an unctuous silkiness that blankets the mouth and lingers a very long time.



NV Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Muscat

90

The NV Rosewood Vineyards Muscat appears only slightly less complex than the Muscadelle. Possessing a very pale brown color with a glint of gold, this wine is quite grapey on the nose with notes of brandied sultanas and spice cake. In the mouth it's very sweet and rich with relatively medium-high acid to balance. The finish is very long with flavors of spicy grape syrup. As with the Muscadelle, this is also an amazing value.

NV Chambers Rosewood Vineyards Rare Muscat

98

The NV Rosewood Vineyards Rare Muscat is deep brown in color with a faintly green rim. Earthy aromas of moss covered logs and damp earth lead to notes of raisin cake, gingerbread, toasted hazelnuts and anise plus a whiff of pepper. Very, very sweet, rich and thick, this wine is an extraordinary meal all its own. Epically long in the finish – this is an experience not to be missed.

Giant Steps

2008 Giant Steps Chardonnay Sexton Vineyard

91

Coming from a 13-year-old vineyard of just over 2 acres, the 2008 Sexton Vineyard Chardonnay is barrel fermented in puncheons using 100% indigenous yeasts in 25% new and 30% 1 year oak. It reveals aromas of intense pineapple, grapefruit and lemon peel over the cashew, meal and sulphidic / struck match notes plus a whiff of cedar. The palate is medium-bodied, crisp, rich, silken and minerally in the very long finish. About 1800 cases are produced. Approachable now, give this wine another year in bottle to really open and evolve and drink over the next 7 to 9 years.

2008 Giant Steps Pinot Noir Sexton Vineyard

90

The 2008 Sexton Vineyard Pinot Noir receives a proportion of whole bunches and some barrel fermentation followed by 12 months maturation in barriques, 35% new, leaving the wine on its lees for as long as possible. It reveals a bright pale to medium ruby color and aromas of ripe cherry, coffee, cooked beets and underbrush. Crisp with a low to medium level of very fine tannins, this is a moderately concentrated, juicy Pinot with a long finish. Around 2000 cases produced, this is one for drinking now or cellaring through 2017.

2008 Giant Steps Harry's Monster

93

Harry's Monster is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc that is only produced every 3-5 years. The grapes are all vinified separately. The best lots are selected and blended in late November, then get 18-20 months in barrel.



Innocent Bystander

2009 Innocent Bystander Pinot Gris

88

Comprised of around 7 different vineyards, the 2009 Pinot Gris is fermented using 50% wild yeast, mainly in tanks though 20% old oak is also used. It has subtle aromas of peaches and golden delicious apples with some capers in there and a pinch of white pepper. With a medium-full body and medium acid, this wine has a nice viscosity in the mouth and a long finish. Drink it now to 2013.

2009 Innocent Bystander Pinot Noir

88

The 2009 Pinot Noir comes from 6 growers right across the Yarra and I'm told all the fruit was harvested before the fires. It receives around 20-30% carbonic maceration. With a medium ruby color, it gives intense, lifted raspberry and warm cherry aromas with that distinctive carbonic estery character. It has a medium body with medium acidity and a good amount of berry fruit in the mid-palate. Drink this one now to 2014.

2008 Innocent Bystander Shiraz / Viognier

89

The 2008 Shiraz Viognier is a blend of 98% Shiraz and 2% Viognier. Deep garnet-purple colored, it has peppery, black cherry and crushed blackberry aromas with a little nutmeg and allspice. Full-bodied, the ample fruit is supported by crisp acid and a medium level of finely textured tannins. Long and pure in the finish, this wine is for drinking from now to 2015.

Jasper Hill

2008 Jasper Hill Grenache Cornelia Vineyard

92

The 2008 Cornelia Vineyard Grenache is a big beauty weighing in at 16% alcohol, yet it's a style that is all about the velvety texture it exudes. Pale to medium garnet colored, it gives pronounced aromas of warm raspberries, powdered cinnamon and nutmeg with dashes of pepper and balsamic. A medium to high level of those wonderful velveteen tannins come though on the palate fleshed by earthy berry fruit and medium acidity. The finish is long and a little warm. Drink this one now to 2016+.

2008 Jasper Hill Emily's Paddock Shiraz and Cabernet Franc

95

Emily's Paddock Shiraz and Cabernet Franc comes from the smallest vineyard on the estate with nothing else planted on it but the grapes for this wine. 3% Cabernet Franc is co-planted with the Shiraz and also co-harvested and co-fermented. The style here is tighter, structured, somewhat backward and yet lends an enticing earthy / savory complexity. The 2008 Emily's Paddock Shiraz and Cabernet Franc possesses a medium-deep garnet color and earthy, mineral aromas with some iron ore, loam, fresh blackberry, a touch of black olive and violets all coming through on the nose. Fine firm tannins and crisp acidity give taut structure to this full-bodied, almost old-world style wine. The finish is very long but restrained developmentally. Give this wine another year or two in bottle and enjoy drinking it to 2022+. 1000 cases produced.



2008 Jasper Hill Shiraz Georgia's Paddock

94

The 2008 Georgia's Paddock Shiraz is a fleshier, opulent and more forward style than Emily's. Deep garnet colored, it has an open and expressive nose of blackberry, licorice, sandalwood, spice box, earth and a hint of game. Fine, firm tannins and medium-high acidity give great structure to the complex palate. Very long and layered in the finish, this wine is best approached from 2011 and enjoyed through 2020+. 300 cases were produced.

2008 Chapoutier and Laughton Cluster M45 Shiraz

92

The 2008 Cluster M45 (named after a star constellation, not London's worst traffic nightmare) has a deep garnet purple color and aromas of warm cassis, dark chocolate and licorice with spicy hints of cumin seed and cassis. Crisp acidity balances the rich, full-bodied, buxom fruit with medium-firm, fine tannins to lend support. The finish is long with a touch of earthy / truffle character coming through. Approachable now, this wine needs another year or so to soften and marry and should continue to give pleasure to 2020+.

2008 Occam's Razor Shiraz

91

The 2008 Occam's Razor Shiraz has a deep garnet-purple color, giving slightly closed blueberry aromas with some cinnamon powder, white pepper, tree bark and cedar. It is well structured with firm, chewy tannins and crisp acid supporting the full-bodied, powerful fruit. Finishing long, drink this wine from 2010 to 2017+.

Mount Mary

2008 Mount Mary Vineyard Chardonnay

91

The fruit for the 2008 Chardonnay comes from the original Chardonnay block planted in 1971/2 and a 20 year block. A small proportion (2 barrels) went through malo-lactic this vintage and it was matured 11 months in oak, 20-25% new, with lees stirring for 3-4 months. It has delicate aromas of peaches, lemon tart, cream, chalk, key lime and meal. The medium-bodied palate has crisp acidity with an enticing bit of ginger coming thorough on the long, mineral finish. This wine is a little tight at the moment and would benefit from another year in bottle and should cellar to 2017+.

2006 Mount Mary Vineyard Pinot Noir

93

The 2006 Pinot Noir spent 22 months in barrel, 15% new. With a pale to medium ruby color, it gives fragrant aromas of violets, game, red cherry and wild strawberry with an earthy whiff of forest floor and truffles. Medium-high acid and a low to medium level of fine tannins lend just enough structure to the intense palate. Long in the finish, this wine is starting to drink now and should continue to be delicious until 2015+. 600 cases were made.



2006 Mount Mary Vineyard Quintet

94

Comprised of 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Merlot, 17% Cabernet Franc and small proportions of Malbec and Petit Verdot, the 2006 Quintet spent 22 months in barrel, 30% of which was large format and just 30% new oak. Winemaker Rob Hall explained that John Middleton liked this wine to come in at around 12.5% alcohol if at all possible and of course it can be a challenge to get phenolics ripe at this level of lightness. But if anyone can do it in this area, Mount Mary can – this vintage came in at a modest 12.9%. Deep garnet in color, this wine has restrained aromas of cassis, dried Mediterranean herbs, graphite and loam plus pinches of cardamom and cloves. Light to medium-bodied with high acid and medium-firm finely grained tannins, this wine finishes very long. It's still a little tight knit and needs 2-3 years to open, thereafter evolving through the next 8-10 years and keeping to 2024+. If this caliber of grapes were produced in Bordeaux they would have chaptalised and put a lot more oak on it, blurring this wonderful expression of the land...shame about the filtration though, particularly on such a delicate wine!

2008 Mount Mary Vineyard Triolet

90

Blended of 70% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Semillon and 10% Muscadelle, the 2008 Triolet spent 11 months in old oak, a third of it in large format with lees stirring for 3-4 months. It is lemon curd and pineapple scented, with subtle notes of struck match, nuts, chalk dust, and brine. The medium-bodied palate lends crisp acid and a long chalky finish. Drinking now, it should continue to cellar until 2015.

Yarra Yering

2008 Yarra Yering Dry Red No 1 (Bordeaux Blend)

94

The 2008 Dry Red No. 1 is a blend of 66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot, 10% Malbec and 4% Petit Verdot and is matured in 100% new oak. With a deep garnet-purple color it is scented of warm blackberries and black currant, eucalyptus, some cinnamon, pencil shavings, and dark chocolate. The palate is a little tight and restrained yet displays remarkable intensity supported by medium to firm finely grained tannins and high acidity. The finish is very long. Give this beauty a good 5 years cellaring, and consider drinking it 2015 to 2025.

2008 Yarra Yering Pinot Noir

91

Matured in 50% new French oak, the 2008 Pinot Noir is bright medium ruby colored with slightly subdued, yet fragrant, aromas of raspberry, cherry and allspice, plus nuances of espresso and dried herbs. The full body has good concentration with medium-high acid and a medium level of fine grained tannins. There's a touch of mocha coming through in the long finish. Approachable now, best to give this wine another year in bottle and enjoy to 2016+.



2008 Yarra Yering Dry Red No 2 (Rhone Blend)

92

Composed mainly of Shiraz with 2% Viognier, 1% Mourvedre and 0.5% Marsanne, the 2008 Dry Red No. 2 gives a medium garnet-purple color and aromas of spiced plums, blueberries, preserved apricots, dried Provence herbs and some earthiness. The palate is wonderfully balanced and textured with a medium level of very fine, silky tannins, high acidity and concentrated exotic fruit flavors lingering long into the finish. Suggested drinking window is 2013 to 2020+.

2008 Yarra Yering Potsorts

95

The 2008 Potsorts is a very intriguing vintage Port lookalike. Very deep garnet-purple colored, it has a seriously spicy Christmas cake nose with supporting notes of prunes, coffee, dark chocolate, dried mulberries, and tree bark. Firm, fine tannins and medium to high acidity balance the sweet, concentrated palate and promise long aging potential, the finish is very long and spicy. Like a vintage Port, this is a little tight and unapproachable now, but give it eight years or so in the cellar, and drink 2018-2028+. Note that Yarra Yering will not release a 2008 Underhill Shiraz as the vineyard performance that year did not meet their expectations.

Yeringberg

2008 Yeringberg Cabernet Blend

92

Blended of 49% Cabernet Sauvignon, 21% Merlot, 11% Cabernet Franc, 10% Malbec and 9% Petit Verdot, the 2008 Cabernet Blend was matured 21 months in French oak, 35% new. With a medium to deep garnet/purple color, it reveals pretty aromas of cassis, eucalyptus, chocolate mints, pencil shavings and cloves. It is well structured with medium to firm very fine tannins and medium-high acidity. With a full body, it has a generous amount of fruit lingering into the long finish. Consider drinking this wine from 2013 and it should continue to evolve and give pleasure to 2022+.

2009 Yeringberg Marsanne / Roussanne

90

Blended of 57% Marsanne and 43% Roussanne, Yeringberg's 2009 Marsanne Roussanne is a medium-bodied wine with spicy aromas of anise, white pepper and fennel seed over lemon butter. The palate gives a pleasantly silky texture and a good amount of warm citrus and peppery flavors as well as a long finish. Drink this now or keep to 2013.

2008 Yeringberg Shiraz

91

The 2008 Shiraz was co-fermented with 2% Viognier and spent 17 months in French oak, 30% new. It has a medium garnet color and intense green peppercorn and spice box aromas over a core of blackberry and black cherry. Full-bodied and richly fruited, offset by medium-high acidity, this wine has rounded tannins and a long finish. It should be drinking best from 2011 to 2017.