

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Australian
Issue

Aussie Pinot Walkabout

The Australians have come a long way with Pinot Noir since the turn of the century when part of the annual output was mixed together and shipped under the name of 'Australian Burgundy'. Like California, many of the early attempts to make world-class Pinot Noir failed because the grape was planted in warm climates and vinified incorrectly. The result was often unappealing jammy, stewed and Syrah-like wines. Over the last 20 years, plantings in appropriate cool climate sites in Southern Australia and Tasmania combined with the use of suitable clones and the adoption of Burgundian winemaking techniques (Burgundy has had more consulting presence here than in the U.S.) has led to some success with Pinot Noir.

The promising areas for Pinot Noir are concentrated in the southeast corner of Australia: **South Australia** (notably Adelaide Hills), **New South Wales** (Canberra, Orange), **Victoria** (which includes the areas of Geelong, Gippsland, Macedon Ranges, Geelong, Mornington Peninsula, and Yarra, **Tasmania**, and in the isolated southernmost tip of **Western Australia** (Pemberton). Map is courtesy of winewalkabout.com.



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Tasmanians are fond of suggesting there are only three great pinot-producing regions in the New World: Central Otago, Oregon and guess where?

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Andy Tan's Aussie Pinot Recommendations

Andy Tan is the owner of Singapore-based Vinifera Private Limited and Veritas Fine Wine Merchant (his newsletter, the "*Vinifera Bi-Weekly*" can be obtained by e-mailing vinifera@singnet.com.sg). Andy is a Pinot enthusiast who keeps his pulse on the action down under. He represents an array of difficult-to-find wines from Australia and New Zealand. Here are his latest comments about Aussie Pinot Noir and his recommendations.

My opinion is that the finest Aussie Pinot Noirs come from Victoria, not Tasmania. Most of the famous Tasmanian Pinot Noirs are made by Andrew Hood, which all taste similar, with pre-ferment character of bright, candied berry fruit. In addition, Hood likes to retain residual sugar, which at times, can be too artificially sweet, especially from a light year. Many Aussie writers like to rave about great southern Pinots, but personally they are too earthy and rustic for my liking. Also, Yarra Valley is too hot for Pinots, and Pinots from this area often have pronounced baked fruit and obvious "spirit"-like personality.

Adelaide Hills: **Ashton Hills** (by Stephen George); **Barratt** (by Jeff Grosset); **Grosset** (by Jeff Grosset); **Knappstein Lenswood** (by Tim Knappstein who together with Steve George and Jeff Grosset, pioneered Pinot Noir in the Adelaide Hills).

Victoria: **Bannockburn** (by Gary Farr) - Geelong; **Bass Phillip** (by Phillip Jones) - Gippsland; **Bindi** (by Stuart Anderson) - Macedon Ranges (The Aussie press is crazy about Bindi but I personally don't like the Stuart Anderson style. It is extracted and masculine with too much earth and rusticity for my liking. Trying to make Shiraz/Syrah out of Pinots?); **By Farr** (by Gary Farr) - Geelong (Burgundian-inspired winemaker, Gary Farr's other project which is 100% barrel-fermented); **Coldstream Hills** (by James Halliday) - Yarra (Halliday is the famous Aussie wine writer who has since sold his estate to Southcorp. The quality underwent some turbulence but apparently Southcorp has restored Halliday back and quality has improved since); **Curlewis** (by Rainer Breit) - Geelong; **Diamond Valley** (by David & James Lance) - Yarra; **Giaconda** (by Rick Kinzbrunner) - Beechworth (the most Chambolle look-alike Pinot maker. Giaconda's Pinot has more purity and fruit expression, but they rarely age well); **Kooyong** (by Sandro Mosele) - Mornington Peninsula (my favorite Pinot maker in Australia); **Main Ridge** (by Nat White) - Mornington Peninsula; **Marinda Park** (by Sandro Mosele); Morning Star (by Sandro Mosele), **Mount Mary** (by Dr John Middleton) - Yarra (by far, the most over-priced and over-rated Pinot Noir maker); **Port Phillip** (by Sandro Mosele) - Mornington Peninsula; **Red Hill** (by Michael Kyberd) - Mornington Peninsula; **Rochford's Eyton** (by David Creed) - Yarra; **Scorpo** (by Sandro Mosele) - Mornington Peninsula; **Scotchmans Hill** (by Robin Brockett) - Geelong; **Stonier** (by Geraldine McFaul) - Mornington Peninsula; **Wantirna** (by Reg & Maryann Egan) - Yarra (one of the few Yarra Pinots I enjoy— very structured and tightly wound); **Willow Creek** (by Phil Kerney) - Mornington Peninsula; **Winbirra** (by Sandro Mosele) - Mornington Peninsula; **Yering Station**— Yarra, **Yeringberg** (by Guill de Pury) - Yarra.

Tasmania: **Domaine A** (A high-profile, luxurious-priced Pinot producer whose wines hardly justify even half the cost); **Elsewhere** (by Andrew Hood); **Freycinet** (This estate is considered to be the finest maker of Pinots in Tasmania); **Pipers Brook** (formerly by Dr Andrew Pine, now Rene Bezemer. The first Pinot Noir in Tasmania planted back in 1972.); **Spring Vale** (by Kristen Lyne); **Tamar Ridge**.

Western Australia: **Old Kent River** (by Alkoomi) - Frankland River (Perhaps the finest Pinots from Western Australia. Producers like Leeuwin, Moss Wood often produce Pinot that is too herbaceous, vegetal, and beetroot in character); **Picardy** (by Dan Pannell) - Pemberton (This family originally founded Moss Wood. Structured, European-inspired Pinots); **Salitage**— Pemberton (This estate occasionally consults with Domaine Pousse d'Or).

The following list includes latest Pinot Noirs especially praised by the Aussie press. I have not

tasted any of them: **Curly Flat**– Macedon Ranges; Eldridge (by David Lloyd) - Mornington Peninsula; **Evelyn County** (by David Lance) - Yarra; **Farr Rising** (by Nicolas Farr, son of Gary Farr) - Geelong; **Frogmore Creek** (by Andrew Hood) - Tasmania; **Hillcrest** (by Phillip Jones) - Yarra; **Hurley** (by Kevin Bell) - Mornington Peninsula (This relatively newcomer receives help from Phillip Jones and Domaine Fourrier of Gevrey Chambertin); **Innisfail** (by Nicolas Farr) - Geelong; **Kyneton Ridge** (by John Boucher) - Macedon Ranges; **Merricks Creek** (by Nicolas Farr) - Mornington Peninsula; **Metier** (by Martin William MW) - Yarra; **Milford** (by Andrew Hood) - Tasmania; **Patrick's** (by Alan Cooper) - Macedon Ranges; **Portree** (by Ken Murchison) - Macedon Ranges; **Provenance** (by Scott Ireland) - Geelong; **Providence** (by Andrew Hood) - Tasmania; **Schindler Northway Down** (by Tammy Schindler-Hands) - Mornington Peninsula; **Tarrington** (by Tamara Irish) - Henty; **Three Wise Men** (by Graeme Leith) - Mornington Peninsula; **Tinderbox** (by Andrew Hood) - Tasmania.

There are a few other producers of note that were not mentioned by Andy: **Apsley Gorge**– Tasmania; **Diamond Valley**– Yarra; **Labyrinth Viggers Vineyard** (by Ariki Hill) - Yarra; **Merricks Creek** (by Nicholas and Gary Farr) - Mornington Peninsula; **Yabby Lake Vineyard** (by Larry McKenna and Tod Dexter) - Mornington Peninsula (see following article on Yabby Lake Vineyard, Best New Wine Producer in Australia).

Price Wars

Like California, Australian Pinot Noirs can be divided roughly into three categories: the super-premium labels (\$50 and up), the middle-market producers (\$25-50), and the entry level brands (\$20 or less). There has been something of a dogfight between Tasmania and Victoria to see who can charge the most. For years, Bass Phillip Reserve Pinot Noir (Victoria) at A\$220 bottle has been Australia's most expensive Pinot Noir. But in 2004, Panorama Vineyard, a small, new producer in Tasmania, released a A\$150 Reserve Pinot Noir. The press went wild and the entire 1000 case production was sold out in a few days. Not to be outdone, Domaine A and Moorilla Estate (both in Tasmania) released Reserve Pinot Noirs for about A\$100. Pinot Noir seems to bring out the elitists everywhere.

Fortunately, there are plenty of good entry level Pinot Noirs coming out of Australia. In California, the best known is Tasmania's **Ninth Island**. This is the value label for Pipers Brooks and priced at about \$20, it has garnered favorable press reviews for its drinkability (see my review on page 5). The **2003 Long Flat Wine Company Pinot Noir** from the Yara Valley (A\$14) received the Penguin Best-Value Red Wine of the Year Award for 2004. This winery is owned by Melbourne wine personality Hugh Cuthbertson. The 2004/2005 Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide comments on this wine: "Yes, there have been a few under \$15 Pinot Noirs around for a while now, but none come within a bull's roar of this one." This wine is not exported to the U.S. but available for A\$9.50 from online wine retailer, Auscellardoor.

Pinot Noir Celebration

The Mornington Peninsula Vignerons Association (MPVA) holds a biannual Pinot Noir Celebration which has become quite a humdinger of an event. This year's Celebration is (sold-out) draws prominent international and Australian Pinot Noir winemakers for two days of focused tastings and seminars. Notable attendees include Burgundy's Domaine de la Vougeral, Merry Edwards from the Russian River Valley appellation of California, Domaine Serene in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, and Ata Rangi and Muddy Waters Wineries of New Zealand. Australia will be represented by Tarrawarra, Scotchman's Hill, and Wellington Wines along with many local Mornington Peninsula wineries.

For more information, contact Cheryl Lee, Executive Officer, MPVA, mpva@mpva.com.au.

Yabby Lake Vineyard “The Acme of Style”

Yabby Lake Vineyard is owned by Robert and Mem Kirby (of Village Roadshow Limited fame) who have been wine enthusiasts involved in the Mornington Peninsula wine scene for decades. The hillside chosen for the 40 hectare Yabby Lake Vineyard is in Tuerong, Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, which is located in a similar latitude to Burgundy, but benefits from a more maritime climate. The site was carefully researched and planned by local vigneron, Gary Crittenden, and national expert, Dr Richard Smart. The goal is to produce premium quality Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in an “elegant, restrained and contemporary style”. The vineyard was planted in 1998 with diverse clones including MV6, G5V15, 114, 115, and D4V2 (Pommard) for Pinot Noir and 110V1, 110V5, P58, Mendoza, B76, B95, and B96 for Chardonnay. The soil has good water-holding capacity with low vigor and fertility. Drip irrigation is judiciously used in Australia’s dry season. Vineyard spacing is 2.7m rows x 1.5m vines (vine density 2500 vines p/h). Trellising is a single cordon with vertical shoot positioning. Heat degree quantum of 1130°C allows ripening of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

The current winemaking team of Larry McKenna and Tod Dexter are both tremendously talented New-World Pinot Noir winemakers. Larry McKenna (known as the ‘Pinot Maestro’) is based in Martinborough, New Zealand where he is a 50% partner with Yabby Lake in a very special vineyard and label known as the ‘Escarpment’ (Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris). Prior to this venture, Larry was the founding winemaker and a partner at Martinborough Winery, one of the pioneering Pinot Noir producers in New Zealand. McKenna has significant experience in Burgundy, having worked a number of vintages there, including some at Domaine Dujac. Tod Dexter was most recently the winemaker at Stoniers on the Mornington Peninsula. During his 15 years here, he made a string of cracker Pinots and a Chardonnay that was judged to be the finest white wine and Chardonnay in the World at the London International Wine Challenge in 2001. Since 1987, he has also farmed his own vineyard just a short distance from Yabby Lake Vineyard and is intimately acquainted with the area.

Yabby Lake Vineyard has burst onto the Australian and world Pinot Noir scene with their first release of Pinot Noir (A\$50) and Chardonnay (A\$35) in 2002. The *Penguin Good Australian Wine Guide 2004/2005* authored by Ralph Kyte-Powell and Huon Hooke named Yabby Lake Vineyard **Best New Producer**, the **2002 Yabby Lake Vineyard Pinot Noir Best Pinot Noir**, and **Best Red Wine** (the first time ever in Australia that a Pinot Noir has been named Best Red Wine). Accolades were notable: “The acme of style: a fabulous, faultless wine that Australia should be proud of. A rich wine of great extract and lovely texture, quite amazing for a wine from such young vines.” In other wine press, the 2002 Chardonnay was highly praised and in *Gourmet Traveller Wine*, they stated that “And while Pinot Noir will no doubt be the long-term flag bearer of Yabby Lake, for now the 2002 Chardonnay ranks even better.” My tasting notes follow.

2002 Yabby Lake Vineyard Pinot Noir (14%) Compared to the other Australian Pinot Noirs I tasted for this issue (see page 5), this wine stood out like a 5-carat Marquis diamond. A dark ruby color is inviting and rich aromas of cassis, black cherry jam and earth tease your anticipation. It is a harmonious wine with a plump, round mouthfeel that is silky smooth. Like a noble Nuits St-Georges at its peak, it is ripe, full, and lush. A bit of brooding and mystery only adds to the pleasure. The finish is long and complex. You sit up in your chair at attention. You have arrived. A ripper.

2002 Yabby Lake Vineyard Chardonnay (14%) Now you know me as a hopeless, dedicated Pinotophile, but (don’t tell anyone) I do enjoy a good Chardonnay. Since I have rarely drunk an Australian Chardonnay, I also tasted the highly-regarded **2001 Leeuwin Estate Artist Series Chardonnay** (14%) side by side for reference (the Leeuwin Artists Series is a classic in Australia, produced since 1978 from grapes grown in the southwest corner of Western Australia). The Yabby Lake was darker yellow, with a buttery nose, a lot of spice and a viscous mouthfeel. Complex and full-bodied, it had interesting overtones of Semillon and a slight botrytis-like finish. A corker of a wine that held my interest next to the Leeuwin. The Leeuwin was more austere, more Meursault-like and overall more in the French model. A little floral, a little tropical (coconut), and a good dose of acid. Bring on the Caesar salad. (continued on next page)

The 2003 Yabby Lake Vineyard wines will be released soon. A major British distributor actually preferred the 2003 wine to the award-winning 2002, so it appears the second vintage holds great promise. At present, there is no American distributor, but arrangements for exportation of small amounts to the United States should be finalized soon. In the meantime, for information and questions you can contact either David Glass at David_Glass@village-leisure.com, or Sally Twopeny at stwopeny@bmkvineyards.com or visit the website at www.yabbylake.com and www.escarpment.co.nz .

Aussie Pinot Noir Tasting

Like at the Australian Open, there were a lot of losers and only one winner. In this tasting, Yabby Lake Vineyard was the Champion, but some of the other wines tasted showed that in time Aussie Pinot Noir can compete with the best in the world. Currently there are few Aussie Pinot Noirs exported to the United States. The wines tasted below were ones readily available to me currently.



2000 Bannockburn Pinot Noir (\$43, 14%) This Pinot Noir is from Bannockburn Vineyards of Victoria. Although highly-praised by Steve Tanzer, I found it to have a cooked cherry and strawberry nose, a sour taste with a touch of medicinal in the finish.

2001 Pinot Noir by Farr (\$40, 13.5%) Also made by Gary Farr at Bannockburn, Victoria (fruit from Geelong). A very light Pinot Noir with faint Pinot Noir character. The nose is barely floral and I just can't coax much fruit out of this wine.

2000 Kooyoung Pinot Noir (\$20, 14%) From the Mornington Peninsula region of Victoria. A decent Pinot that is more Burgundian than Californian. The entry is earthy, the fruit is restrained and the finish lacks strength. A Bourgogne style that does not match up with similar offerings at this price from Burgundy.

2001 Kooyoung Haven Single Vineyard Pinot Noir (\$45, 13.5%) Pleasant fruity nose that is a bit subdued. Light in body, but offering some interesting dark fruits, earth, and barnyard. More lean, austere and delicate like Burgundy. Not particularly complex but a lovely strawberry finish. Visit the website at kooyoung.com.

2001 Ninth Island Pinot Noir (\$15) A fruity, tasty drinker from Tasmania. A lot of pop for the buck. The ripe, lovely Pinot fruit would appeal to California drinkers. Not terribly complex, but doesn't claim to be.

1999 Bass Phillip Premium Pinot Noir (\$80, 13%). James Halliday raved about Bass Phillip Pinot Noirs when they appeared on the scene in the late 1980s. He said, "Tiny quantities of some of the most exciting Pinot Noir to be made in Australia came onto the market in late 1990. The wines have tremendous concentration of flavour, power, and length, yet retain the essence of Pinot Noir's varietal character. In style they are akin to the best wines of Vosne-Romanee, Burgundy, and will be very long-lived. I purchased and drank a few bottles back in the early 1990s for the ridiculous price of \$30. They were big, jammy wines that were very atypical for New World Pinot Noir. Owned by Phillip Jones, he employs low cropping, no irrigation, and non-residual vineyard treatments at his vineyard in South Gippsland, Victoria. Winemaking uses indigenous yeasts, gravity feed, and no pumping or filtration. This wine was very bizarre. It had an unappealing orange tinge and a very unusual cooked fruit flavor (almost port-flavored). It was unusually cloudy. The nose was more Zin than Pinot. With decanting and several hours, the fruit faded and the acid came to the forefront. Maybe a storage problem here or did I somehow get a bottle from the Focker's Vineyard instead?"

All in all, I don't think most Aussie Pinot Noirs offer the quality drinking experience to justify the prices commanded. That said, there are some superb wines being made and many of the small production, excellent Pinot Noirs do not find their way to the United States yet. The potential is evident. Stay tuned.