

WINESTATE

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND WINE BUYING GUIDE

SPECIAL EDITION 2008

WINE OF THE YEAR

56-Page
SPECIAL FEATURE

the best wines, winemakers
& wine companies of the year


*Living
History*

HONOURS KEEP
FLOWING FOR
RAY BECKWITH

WHERE RIESLING REIGNS

From sweet to dry, a renaissance in Rheingau

Heritage
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RESERVE CHARDONNAY

2007

Granite Belt, Queensland

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plus

Hunter Valley Riesling Sauvignon Blanc Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio

hunter valley

GORGEOUS GEORGIAN

GROUPS of wine-loving friends will enjoy staying at Claremont House, part of the Warrarong Estate property in Lovedale. The Georgian-style vineyard accommodation features five bedrooms - ideal for several couples - rented on a self-contained basis. It's the perfect spot to wind down over a few glasses of wine, with two large sitting rooms, a dining room, verandah and barbecue facilities. Phone (02) 4930 7594; <www.warrarongestate.com.au>.



ROCK WINS ANOTHER HAT

ROCK Restaurant, part of the Poole's Rock complex at Pokolbin, became the first Hunter Valley restaurant to earn two hats in the *Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide* for 2009 and was also named best regional restaurant in New South Wales. ROCK opened only in 2007 and overlooks 90-year-old shiraz vines. Chef Andrew Clarke's constantly changing menu features contemporary Australian cuisine with French influences.

The chic, modern venue is actually two restaurants in one: ROCK for dinners Thursday-Saturday and Firestick Cafe, serving casual food and wood-fired pizzas, seven days a week from 9.30am-5pm. Andrew, who won his first hat in 2007, says he is a passionate advocate of fresh, seasonal and regional ingredients. Phone (02) 4998 6968; <www.rockrestaurant.com.au>.

CATCH A GREAT MEAL

CATCH at Shoal Bay is the signature restaurant of the Shoal Bay Resort and Spa complex and overlooks the Tomaree and Yacaaba headlands that form the entrance to Port Stephens. A winner in the NSW Restaurant & Catering Awards, Catch offers regular 'Tastes of the Hunter' evenings throughout the year at which guests enjoy a six-course meal accompanied by wines and commentary by a leading winemaker. It's also a terrific place for an overnight stay, with really comfortable rooms and terrific facilities. Phone 1800 18 1810; <www.shoalbayresort.com.au>.

DESTINATIONS GREAT AND SMALL

THERE are certain cellar doors to which a visit is de rigueur on any first trip to the Hunter: Tyrrell's, McWilliam's Mount Pleasant, Brokenwood and Tempus Two spring to mind. Similarly, there are iconic restaurants such as ROCK at Poole's Rock, Terroir at Hungerford Hill, The Cellar and Esca Bimbadgen that should form part of any novice's itinerary.

For regular visitors to the Hunter, however, there are myriad alternative delights, small cellar doors and lesser-known restaurants that make it worthwhile getting off the beaten track. Several of the smaller wineries have lovely (and largely undiscovered) cellar doors, including Moorebank Private Vineyard (try the wines, but also a range of condiments including their spicy grape sauce); Adina Vineyard at Lovedale with its lively cafe; Keith Tulloch with a superb tasting room overlooking the vines and spectacular semillons, chardonnays and shiraz; Glandore Estate, where Duane Roy is producing an outstanding range; Mistletoe, which has fine wines along with an art gallery and sculpture garden; and biodynamic producer Krinklewood, out the back of Broke but worth a detour.

There are also several smaller restaurants producing excellent food, including Leaves & Fishes at Lovedale, with terrific menus and a good local wine list, the funky and impressive



Mojo's On Wilderness at Rothbury, Margan Restaurant and cellar door at Broke, Major's Lane and Amanda's On The Edge.

When it comes to produce, the Binnorie Dairy in Pokolbin is the least publicised, but probably the most impressive, of the Hunter cheese producers. For full details of all Hunter tourism options, visit <www.winecountry.com.au> or phone (02) 4990 0900.

GOURMET TAKEAWAY

THE Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley has become a firm favourite with both locals and visitors since opening three years ago - and is perfectly situated for exploring the wineries of Lovedale and Pokolbin. Star Anise restaurant, which features Chinese, Indian and Thai dishes that can be mixed and matched as you wish, is now offering takeaway from Tuesday to Saturday night - a boon for anyone staying in self-catering accommodation. All takeaway dishes are prepared and served identically to those in the restaurant and pre-orders can also be arranged for those travelling to the valley. Phone (02) 4991 0956 or see <www.crowneplaza.com.au>.

BOUTIQUE'S WINERY FLIGHT COUP

TINY Hunter winery Whispering Brook received a huge boost when its chardonnay, semillon and shiraz were chosen as one of the first three-glass wine flights to feature at Sydney's Sofitel Wentworth's Garden Court

The other two flights in the initial offering feature Ruinart Champagnes and a French selection, making Whispering Brook the only Australian winery selected. Sommelier Nobuko Okamura says she loves highlighting small, undiscovered wineries.

Visitors to Whispering Brook - a boutique, family-owned winery, guesthouse and olive grove at Broke - are invited to join in an informative tour of the vineyards and olive groves, followed by a tutored tasting of boutique wine and olive products. Phone (02) 9818 4126; <www.whispering-brook.com.au>.

MERCURE RISES

TALLAWANTA Lodge, the most centrally situated accommodation choice in Pokolbin, is no more. Taking its place after a refurbishment is the Grand Mercure Hunter Valley Gardens. Each of the 72 rooms (and there is a vast range of styles) opens out to a private balcony or courtyard offering valley views, with the superb gardens just a short stroll away. Facilities include tennis courts, a resort-style swimming pool, sauna, spa and the Lodge library. Several wineries are within walking distance.



RISE WITH THE SUN

IT MEANS an unnaturally early start to the day, but there can be no more exhilarating way to see the Hunter than from a dawn flight on Balloon Aloft. The company has been soaring above the Hunter at sunrise since 1980 - and you get an altogether different perspective from up above as kangaroos scatter below.

Each flight is celebrated with sparkling wine, fruit juice and a light breakfast after a successful touchdown. Flights start from \$295 per person and make the perfect birthday present. It's hard not to be impressed as you move at up to 35km/h over the vines at a height of between 800 and 1000m.

All participants help unpack and pack the massive balloons, which adds to the total experience. Up to six balloons fly each day, but only if the weather is deemed safe by your skipper. Phone (02) 4991 1955 or 1800 028 568; <www.balloonaloft.com>.

The hotel recently opened a new restaurant on the property - The Hunter Valley Steakhouse, the perfect match for Hunter shiraz. Executive chef Jean-Marc Pollet, ex-Kables and Chez Pok, also has a fine dining restaurant on the planning table, which should be open by the time you read this. Phone (02) 4998 2000 or email <reservations@gmhvg.com.au>.

TOP BISTRO'S NEW LOCATION

BISTRO Molines, the latest success story for leading Hunter chef Robert Molines, is on the move. I recently had one of my best lunches of the year at the old location, at the Margan cellar door on Hermitage Rd, but now Robert and his wife Sally have moved to Tallavera Grove at Mount View.

The menu will evolve according to the seasons, but will not change dramatically,

Sally says. That means Francophiles will still flock to try dishes like duck liver pate with pickled vegetables and homemade chutney, zucchini flowers filled with goat's cheese and escalopes of veal with crushed Jerusalem artichokes and porcini sauce, accompanied by a small, but well thought out, wine list. For details of the new venture, see <www.bistromolines.com.au>.

LOTS ON THE AUTUMN MENU

IF YOU want to really be involved in the action, April and May are probably the best months to visit the Hunter Valley (although there seems to be something going on at just about any time of year). April sees the weekend-long Semillon and Seafood festivities, while the annual Lovedale Long Lunch is held each May (16-17 in 2009), along with Hunter Wine and Food Month, which showcases the best wines and fresh produce with a series of tastings, lunches, dinners and masterclasses, concluding with the annual Hunter Valley Legends dinner. See <www.hvwineandfood.hvva.com.au> or call (02) 4990 0900.

SUPERBLY SMALL

IT'S ALL change at the Small Winemakers Centre in Pokolbin, which is now being run by Ian and Suzanne Little of the Little Wine Company. The range has become more focused and the Littles are concentrating on the best small producers in the valley, including themselves, Margan, Keith Tulloch and Thomas Wines (for whom winemaker Andrew Thomas is in fine form). The Littles' own wines are well worth seeking out, particularly non-mainstream varieties like gewurztraminer, sangiovese and tempranillo. The centre is open 10am-5pm daily and there is also an on-site cafe and several tasting rooms that host regular functions. Phone (02) 4998 7668 or see <www.smallwinemakerscentre.com.au>.

Above: Grand Mercure Hunter Valley Gardens.

Opposite page.

Left: Rock restaurant at Poole's Rock winery.

Right: Views at the Shoal Resort and Spa.

travelbriefs

WINSOR DOBBIN

queensland

WINE LISTS WITH STATE FOCUS

THE OFTEN-underrated Queensland wine industry got a much-needed boost with the launch of an all-Queensland wine list in Mercure hotels around the state - the first such support from a major hotel chain. The French-owned Accor group has launched a range of wine lists - known as the Grands Vins list - highlighting the best drops available from each state.

Among the leading Queensland wineries whose offerings are being sold by the glass and bottle at Mercure hotels in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns are Granite Belt wineries Symphony Hill, Robert Channon, Ballandean Estate, Summit Estate, Mount Tamborine-based Witches Falls and South Burnett stand-out Barambah. Accor regional general manager Queensland, Neil Scanlan, says the launch of the Queensland list is not only significant for the wine industry but also for Queensland tourism. See <www.mercurehotels.com>.

GRANITE BELT'S ALTERNATIVE DIRECTION

HAD enough of chardonnay and shiraz? The winemakers in and around Stanthorpe, just north of the New South Wales border, are hoping to entice you to the Granite Belt. Visitors have warmly embraced the recently introduced alternative grape varieties wine trail launched by Granite Belt Wine and Tourism (GBWT).

The Strange Bird Trail highlights non-mainstream grape varieties grown in the Granite Belt. GBWT director of marketing Michele Cozzi says the trail is aimed at adventurous and experienced wine drinkers who are looking for something different. The varieties available for tastings at Granite Belt cellar doors include barbera, chenin blanc, colombard, durif, gewurztraminer, malbec, marsanne, mourvedre, nebbiolo, petit verdot, pinot gris, sylvaner, tannat, tempranillo and viognier.

More than 20 wineries are involved, all displaying the Strange Bird symbol at their cellar doors, so visitors can follow a route provided on the brochure and discover

the region's many points of difference. To introduce visitors to the wines, the brochure lists the participating wineries, the varieties they produce, a pronunciation guide, what foods complement each wine and a brief tasting note.

"I think the trail is an exciting and informal way to introduce customers to these not-so-common varieties," Hidden Creek winemaker Jim Barnes says. Wineries involved in the scheme include Ballandean Estate, Boireann, Golden Grove Estate, Granite Ridge, Hidden Creek, Lucas Estate, Ravens Croft Wines, Ridgemill Estate, Robert Channon Wines, Sirromet, Summit Estate, Symphony Hill and Whiskey Gully. Visitors can get a copy of the Strange Bird map and brochure from <www.granitebeltwinecountry.com.au> or by phoning 1800 SO COOL.

MORE ROOM FOR SIRROMET VISITORS

SIRROMET Wines has expanded its cellar door outdoor area at its winery headquarters at Mount Cotton, near Brisbane, to cater for a surge in visitor numbers.

An average of 1000 people a week now visit the cellar door, which is open daily and offers sales and tastings, tours, live music on weekends, gourmet food at Lurleen's restaurant, delicatessen-style products to take away, merchandise and wine accessories.

"Cellar door is the first place some of our new wines are released to the public, so that's an attraction for serious wine enthusiasts," says owner Terry Morris. "On the other hand, more and more people are visiting simply for a relaxing day out to enjoy the wine and food and weekend music on offer, or stroll around the vineyards."

Most of Sirromet's wines (made largely from Granite Belt fruit) are available and can be purchased by the glass or bottle at cellar door. There are daily \$5 tastings for customers to sample eight different wines and keep the glass. Tastings can be combined with a winery tour for \$10 per person, while live music is provided from 1pm to 4pm most Saturdays and Sundays. See <www.sirromet.com.au>

GO SOUTH FOR A CHANGE

THE SOUTH Burnett region is struggling to get the message out. It's a new, and largely undiscovered, wine region that is home to more than 20 wineries and cellar doors. The countryside is spectacularly beautiful but there are no big city facilities.

The South Burnett is located on top of the Great Dividing Range and is 2½ hours' drive north-west of Brisbane, inland from the Sunshine Coast. Major towns include Kingaroy, Nanango and Goomeri.



Clovely Estate, Captain's Paddock, Ziebarth, Moffatdale Ridge and Crane Wines all have good ranges of wine available for tasting. Barambah make outstanding chardonnay, cabernet and shiraz and its cellar door is shared with the Kingaroy Cheese Company, a great place to stop for a gourmet tasting. Captain's Paddock bistro is the perfect spot for a winery lunch, while Ziebarth's do great homemade pies, Moffatdale Ridge offers good food and great views and the Bell Tower restaurant outside Kingaroy does gourmet dinners.

Deshons Retreat is a very classy country getaway outside Kingaroy with two very well equipped cottages and welcoming owners. A peaceful country retreat on 23ha of bushland, it is located beside Crane Wines and serves excellent meals if you don't fancy driving the 9km to Kingaroy. Phone (07) 4163 6688; <www.deshonsretreat.com.au>.



SOFITEL'S STYLISH NEW LOOK

THE SOFITEL Brisbane has always been one of the Queensland capital's most stylish addresses, and is even more so now with the new Thyme restaurant and Cuvee lounge bar. A multimillion-dollar renovation of Sofitel's ground floor resulted in a sleek and stylish lobby and innovative new dining and lounge scene.

Cuvee Lounge Bar serves fine champagnes, wines, cocktails and spirits, with vintage and non-vintage labels from 20 of the world's great champagne houses joined by a selection of Australian, European and New World wines. There's also a martini menu and a range of appetisers is available. Phone (07) 3835 3535; <www.sofitelbrisbane.com.au>.

GOURMET PARADISE

MOUNT Tamborine, midway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast, is a wonderful spot, surrounded by rainforests. It's also home to two of Queensland's best gourmet experiences: Songbirds in the Forest restaurant and the Witches Falls winery cellar door. Songbirds in the Forest recently won the Queensland restaurant of the year award for excellence, and has racked up a hatful of honours over the past 12 months. Chef Philip Edwards's food is wonderful; the service spot on and there's a fine wine list with several Queensland offerings

prominent. There are also some lovely villas in gorgeous gardens for weekend or midweek stays at Songbirds Rainforest Retreat. (<www.songbirds.com.au>).

Witches Falls Winery, a small, family owned and operated winery, offers a lovely cellar door experience and some excellent wines. Sourcing premium grapes from the Granite Belt, this boutique winery produces a range of quality handmade wines. Make sure you try the outstanding 2007 Marsanne and '08 Moscato. See <www.witchesfalls.com.au>.

CHIC CHOICES FOR TRAVELLERS

BRISBANE'S hotel scene has undergone a real resurgence over the past year with the opening of the chic 108-room Emporium Hotel and, more recently, the first Australian member of the Design Hotels group, the Limes Hotel, also in Fortitude Valley.

With 21 rooms aimed at independent travellers, the funky Limes (<www.limeshotel.com.au>) offers an open-air rooftop bar which has stunning



BIG ENCORE FOR MASTERCLASS

THE HILTON Brisbane Courier-Mail Singapore Airlines Masterclass Weekend returned with a bang in 2008 after a two-year absence. This is, quite simply, one of the best food and wine events in the country, with the chance to taste wines from the likes of Ayala, Dr Loosen, Olivier Leflaive, Isolee Olena and several leading Australian (and Queensland producers), hear from winemakers such as Iain Riggs, Stefano Lubiana, Sandro Moselle, Nick Farr and Rollo Crittenden, and attend cooking classes with the likes of Mark Best, George Calombaris, Frank Camorra, Michel Richard, Luc Nguyen and Steve Manfredi. It is not yet known whether the Masterclass will run every year or every second year from now on, but you can register your interest and find more details at <www.qldmasterclass.com.au>.

city views and hosts movies at night, as well as wireless and broadband Internet access. The Emporium (<www.emporiumhotel.com.au>), in the heart of a stylish shopping precinct, offers several nice little touches, including a selection of pillows.

The rooftop features a lap pool, sauna and gym, while the lobby adjoins a stunning cocktail bar with an excellent selection of wines.

Lovers of fine foods will love nearby Jocelyn's Provisions, where owner Jocelyn Hancock and her team hand-craft superb cakes, biscuits and other pastries, as well as what have been proclaimed the best savoury pies in Brisbane. See <www.jocelynsprovisions.com.au>.

Left: Songbirds in the Forest restaurant.
Right: Emporium Hotel.

Opposite page: Deshons retreat.