

WINES TO WATCH



FELIX CAMPBELL-MATTINSON

Darkness and Light

There are many shades of red, as these new-release wines demonstrate, going beyond the blockbuster style to combine richness with refinement.



TULLOCH PRIVATE BIN SHIRAZ

When you look at the Hunter Valley and its classic old vineyards and names, it can be hard to tell which is which and who belongs where. It's a bit like a pack of vineyard cards – every 10 years someone shuffles the title leases around. Or maybe musical chairs; when I consider the region's best old vineyards I swear I can hear a banjo playing, and I can't help thinking that when it stops everyone has to quickly grab a site and stake their claim. All of which is relevant to this beautiful new wine from the Hunter Valley's Tulloch winery.

Tulloch is one of the great names of Australian wine, yet over the past 20 years it has been used, abused and often, sad to say, neglected. It has moved through changes of ownership and been chopped and diced, the land and the brand name divorced from one another. For a time, the Tulloch family had nothing to do with it. Thankfully, however, the Tulloch brand returned to family ownership in 2001, though its great old vineyards are now in the hands of Poole's Rock.

Although Tyrrell's and Mount Pleasant are the best known of the Hunter Valley wine names, Tulloch is one of the grandest. If you go back 40 years, Tulloch Private Bin Red vied with Penfolds Grange for the mantle of Australia's best, and most expensive, wine. When you taste some of the great Tulloch Private Bin reds from the 1950s and '60s, you stare the magic of wine in the eye.

Now for the best bit: the Tulloch family has produced a mighty fine red wine from the mighty fine 2005 Hunter red vintage. It has also made it in a traditional Hunter Valley red style and sourced it from 100-year-old shiraz vines growing on the Tallawanta Vineyard. The label and the style of the wine are a direct reference to the great old reds of

the '60s, the only real change being that it is sealed with a screwcap and is nowhere near today's price of Penfolds Grange – A\$40 for this 2005 Tulloch Private Bin Shiraz (also see Best Buy Wines, page 145), via the cellar door.

This is a lovely, medium-bodied wine, tasting of almonds, raspberries, vanilla and licorice, with the odd note of dried twigs and red earth bringing the Hunter region to life, right there in your glass. I reckon everyone should nab themselves a couple of bottles of this. But move fast – only 300 dozen were made.

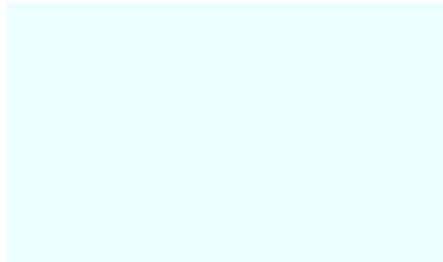
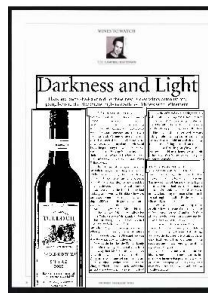
TAPANAPPA WHALEBONE VINEYARD CABERNET SHIRAZ

Despite the fanfare, I didn't like the first release of this wine from the 2003 vintage. The new project of Australian wine legend Brian Croser, it had come from mature vines at Wrattonbully in South Australia, and was backed by the financial and intellectual might of leading Bordeaux winery Château Lynch-Bages.

If ever a new wine was going to be excellent, it was this one. Yet it seemed to me to be clumsy, over-oaked and too high in alcohol. Maybe I was overly optimistic, but I was certainly expecting more.

The new 2004 Tapanappa Whalebone Vineyard Cabernet Shiraz (A\$77) delivers that "more". A superb wine that will age well over the long-term, it is full of dense, dark fruit, yet is firm and long too, its structure and power sending out all the right quality signals.

The flavours are mostly in the cigar-box, blackcurrant and chocolate spectrum, but there's a refinement that pushes it beyond the ordinary. Tapanappa is suddenly a big name in quality Australian red wine, and I am now wholly on board.



CLYDE PARK PINOT NOIR

It's not difficult to see why Clyde Park is a Geelong winery with a growing reputation. It was established in 1979 but has made great strides since the mid-1990s, the past five years showcasing a string of excellent wines, mostly using the shiraz, pinot noir and chardonnay varieties. The wine that's really caught my eye recently, though, is the 2005 Clyde Park Pinot Noir (A\$27). This is an excellent wine. There's a bit of sap and tree bark in the flavour, but it's mostly sweetly cherried and floral, both the fragrance and the taste of it just begging you to drink more. Five years ago, I wouldn't have believed that pinot noir of this quality was available for such a price: now there are scores of really good affordable Australian pinots on the market. This is one of them.

PICARDY PINOT NOIR

Generally, I tend to discount Western Australia when I think of Australian pinot noir, but this wine throws all such prejudices out the window. I guess I shouldn't be surprised: Picardy is the winery set up by the Pannell family in 1993, fresh from their sale of Moss Wood. I guess you don't sell a winery like that unless you're onto something. This pinot noir shows that they definitely are.

The 2005 Picardy Pemberton Pinot Noir (A\$35) is a beautiful wine. It will develop in the cellar too, its spine of acid and tannin as well crafted as any pinot noir three times the price. Ripe, sour-sweet and full of chalky, earthy tannins, it's alive with vibrant cherry-like fruit flavour. It's also light in colour yet surprises you with its intensity of flavour after you take a mouthful – I love a wine's ability to leap out at you like that.

MOUNT MAJURA VINEYARD SHIRAZ

The 2005 Mount Majura Shiraz (A\$23) is not only wonderful, it's a steal. Wines such as this make me think we'll be hearing a lot more about the Mount Majura winery and the Canberra District in future. If Clonakilla had not made the point clearly enough (which, of course, it has), then this wine gives it clear emphasis: the region can be fantastic for shiraz.

The Tulloch family has produced a mighty fine red wine, its label and style a reference to the great old reds of the 1960s.

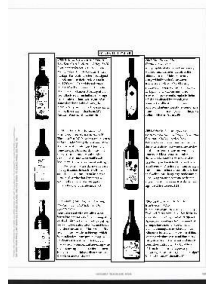
To begin with, it's very elegant, with a ripe core of powerful blueberry/dark cherry fruit and a sweet easiness that's beautifully tempered by ground spice and black pepper. Those flavours, however, are only part of the picture; it's more fitting to mention the way it never seems too warm or too overdone, the way it moves across and effortlessly delights your tongue. It also comes as no surprise to hear that the wine only saw 28 per cent new French oak, the remainder of it being matured in used French oak barrels.

The word elegance is bandied about quite a bit, but this is the real deal –

an expression of mature-vineyard shiraz grown on volcanic soils in the best possible way. If you have any inclination towards cool-climate red wines, this should be high on your shopping list.

It's also no fluke but part of a string of good shiraz releases from this winery – both the 2002 and 2004 Mount Majura Shiraz wines were excellent. Just quietly, they also produce a strikingly pure, intense riesling. But that's another story.

Campbell Mattinson is the publisher of www.winefront.com.au.



WINES TO CELLAR



2005 Tulloch Private Bin Pokolbin Dry Red Shiraz, Hunter Valley, A\$40*
Over the past few years, Tulloch has been taking new pride in its 100-year Hunter heritage. The labels have been redesigned to look more like their predecessors in the 1950s and '60s, and the red wines, in particular, have been moulded in the classic, savoury Hunter style. Top of the tree is the Private Bin: half a century ago, wines under this label were regarded as some of the best in the country; this magnificently complex, earthy, spicy shiraz is a worthy return to that form. MA
*See also *Wines to Watch*, page 36.



2003 Majella The Malleea, Coonawarra, A\$66
A flagship blend of cabernet and shiraz, sourced from the ripest parcels of the oldest vines from Majella's extensive vineyard holdings in Coonawarra. By any standards, it's a blockbuster, a superstar with massive vanilla, chocolate, dark plum and blackcurrant flavours, tremendous power and complexity before a finish dominated by smooth, ripe tannins. For all that, there's harmony, balance and integration of the components; a sum that is more complete than the parts. Cellar for five to 10 years. PF



2004 Penfolds Bin 707 Cabernet Sauvignon, South Australia, A\$160
The latest Bin 707 shows a welcome return to form, undoubtedly the best since 1998. The nose is still quite closed, but with some air opens to reveal dense aromas of black fruit, hints of wood smoke, dark chocolate and sweet vanilla oak. The palate is equally restrained, with an underlying depth and richness that leads to a tight, almost linear, finale. But what a finish – the aftertaste remains almost forever. It's a wine that demands five years in the cellar and will happily remain there for a decade more. PB



2004 Roberto Voerzio Vigneti S Francesco Fontanazza Langhe Nebbiolo, Piedmont (Italy), A\$75/NZ\$74
Roberto Voerzio is a serious producer, and this wine is already showing some mellow aged maturity: earthy, meaty with oaky aromas and licorice notes chiming in at the back. The tannin grip goes hand in hand but is well matched by sweetly ripe fruit flavours. It's a dry, firm number right now and needs a hearty meat dish, such as beef wellington – its grippy, rustic tannins need that protein to combine with them and soften off. It's a wine that shows every sign it will live forever. HH



2001 Herzog Spirit of Marlborough Merlot Cabernet, Marlborough, A\$76/NZ\$56
Dense, deep red with appealing sweet berry fruit and savoury flavours suggesting crushed wild blackberry, blackcurrant jam and cedar. I was absolutely stunned to see that the wine was from Marlborough (but less so to see it was from Herzog), which is an indication of my prejudice against Bordeaux-style reds from that region. It is a superb, complex and appealing wine that is showing some bottle development but has the potential to deliver pleasure for at least another decade. BC



2005 Castagna Genesis Syrah, Beechworth, A\$75
Here's a very ripe, finely crafted and deeply flavoured shiraz from one of Beechworth's key makers. Sporting more overt ripeness than previous vintages, but retaining that all-important length of vibrant fruit flavour, it manages to avoid overcooked influences. Its heady, spicy aromas of black pepper, dark plum, cassis and blackberry integrate with mocha-like oak and meaty, forest floor undertones. Dark and briary, it's firm, fine-grained and powdery, delivering an excellent length of sour-edged fruit and a hint of minerality. JO