

Right in our own backyard we can find wines to rival the best in the land, writes **Peter Bourne**. So let's get to know them.

Photography Dieu Tan

wine local heroes

Sydneysiders are a parochial lot. We regard the Swans, the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House as sacrosanct but don't take the same pride in our local wines – happily drinking New Zealand sauvignon blanc, Tasmanian pinot, Barossa shiraz and anything from Margaret River. Apart from Hunter Valley semillon, wines from NSW hardly get a look-in. Local drinkers are so fixated on the emerging regions of Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia that exciting developments in our own backyard largely go unnoticed.

Over the past 30 years, NSW has morphed from a single winegrowing hub, based in the Hunter Valley, to a state with a viticultural diversity – from Mudgee to the Canberra region – that rivals anything that our southern neighbours have to offer. So why wines from our home state are so poorly represented on retail shelves and restaurant lists remains a mystery.

The Tumbarumba and Orange regions are fine examples of the changing landscape. If you're tired of weedy Marlborough sauvignon, try a fresh herb-garden style from Tumbarumba or a complex nettles-and-gooseberry version from Orange. Want a bold red to compete with the brash boys from South Australia? A good Mudgee cabernet has echoes of the savoury characters of the Clare, while the Hilltops area (near Young) produces dense mulberry-rich cabernets and sweetly spiced shiraz.

The Hunter has also been swept up in the revolution. The region no longer relies on the stalwarts of semillon, chardonnay and shiraz. Merlot and verdelho thrive, with newly introduced Italian varieties such as sangiovese and barbera doing well. In the Hilltops region, The Grove winery is making an excellent nebbiolo, while Brian Freeman at Freeman Vineyards produces an Amarone-style red using rondinella and corvino grapes.

In fact, the state's incredible diversity of climate, elevation and aspect has spawned a vast range of styles. The Great Dividing Range has had a huge influence on viticulture as it shelters the inland wine regions from the wet and humid coastal weather. The regions west of the Divide have a temperate climate offering warm days, cool nights and cold winters. Fussy varieties such as riesling and pinot noir welcome such an environment. Geological diversity isn't a problem either, with sandy loam and limestone soils on the coastal fringe and ancient granitic and basalt soils on the western slopes of the Divide.

So if NSW ticks all the diversity boxes, why don't our wine merchants and sommeliers provide more support? Ian Cook of Five Ways Cellars in Paddington is one retailer who goes into bat for the state's wines. A recent tasting featured such gems as Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon and Vat 9 Shiraz, a Clonakilla from the Canberra district, a Philip Shaw from Orange and a range of Hunter winemakers, including Meerea Park, David Hook and Andrew Thomas.

Brokenwood also got a tick. Although based in the Hunter Valley, the winery now sources grapes from Orange, Cowra and even Bathurst for its Mount Panorama Chardonnay. Other Hunter operators including Tamburlaine, Capercaillie, David Hook and Tower Estate have followed suit, all sourcing fruit from Orange. And let's not overlook the Riverina. Apart from being the powerhouse of the Australian wine industry, it is also home to the prestigious dessert wine, the De Bortoli Noble One, one of many wondrous Riverina stickies.

Putting together a complete range of the state's wines – from sparkling to white, red and dessert – should not be difficult. So if you can't find a particular NSW wine at your bottle shop, complain long and loud. It's time we got parochial about our local heroes.



2007 Swinging Bridge Estate Shiraz, Canowindra, \$19.99

Canowindra, on the periphery of the Central Ranges, is best known for its boldly flavoured reds. Voted Top Red at the 2008 NSW Wine Awards, this shiraz offers dense aromas of dark plums, wild blackberries and an edge of earthiness.



2008 Chalkers Crossing Riesling, Hilltops, \$19.99

French winemaker Celine Rousseau guides the fortunes of Chalkers Crossing wines. This outstanding riesling is fresh and floral, with sweet citrus and white blossom flavours enhanced by a rich texture. A snap of lemon acidity lengthens the finish.



2000 Hardys Sir James Tumbarumba Pinot Noir Chardonnay Pinot Meunier, \$49.99

This is a mature and gracious wine, made from pure Tumbarumba fruit. The aromatics are rich and complex with a plethora of biscuity, glacé fruit, lime marmalade, nougat and lemon curd flavours. The palate is rich and full.



2006 Shaw Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon, Canberra District, NSW, \$21.99

Shaw Vineyard Estate is a relatively new player, but has already caught the attention of the show judges. This cabernet sauvignon is a dark-fruited wine with blackcurrant aromas. Middleweight yet intensely flavoured.



2006 David Hook The Gorge Barbera, Hunter Valley, \$18.99

This is an exceptional barbera. The name harks from Piedmont, its terroir vastly different from the Hunter, and yet this wine shows all the hallmarks of the variety, with bright cherry flavours and soft tannins. A deliciously drinkable red.