



ANDREW JEFFORD

IN AUSTRALIA

Broad horizons, broad minds

This was good. The Suckfizzle 2007 Sauvignon Blanc-Semillon: refined, creamy, vinous, linen-textured. Ripe too, but with the freshness of plant sap and celery giving it a spring lift. The wine drew out a little of the complexity and flavour development you find when these varieties are conjoined in Pessac-Léognan. (Many of these blends in Margaret River are picked injudiciously underripe to make a tart, taut wine.) Winemaker Stuart Pym went off to look for more bottles.

I looked out through a eucalypt fringe to the lake beyond. The water glittered in the generous winter sunshine. Pym returned. The sun disappeared abruptly, as if someone had thrown a switch on it. By the time he poured the wines out, the lake had mottled with rain. Several minutes later, water was sluicing from the sky in grey veils. The winery became a drum. We lived the rain's percussion.

It's hard to hear the word 'squall' without thinking of the sea. Abrupt, drenching, gusty, demonic but abbreviated. I'm just back from 10 days in Western Australia, and I've never known so much rain, nor known rain interrupted so capriciously by such bright sunshine. Margaret River soaks up twice London's annual rainfall, three quarters of it in the winter months of May to September; parts of Great Southern are even wetter. The Roaring Forties charge by, further south. It's an ocean junction. This is especially true of the Suckfizzle vineyard near Augusta, within the luminous sweep of the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse. On the wrong soil type, Margaret River could be winter swampland. Happily, there's an

entire province of pea-shot laterite gravels here, and the water melts away through them to the soapy clays beneath.

Other benefits of this place apart? Well, some of the best natural tannins in Australia – for those who choose to let them develop, look after them during the harvesting process, and then work them effectively during and after fermentation. This is particularly true of the most propitious Cabernet-producing part of Margaret River, which is warm Willyabrup. No one is growing or extracting tannins more effectively than Vanya Cullen and her team, as the chunky

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yet fragrant 2007 Diana Madeline (predominantly Cabernet) and the 2007 Mangan (Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec, from a different site) proves. Moss Wood and Woodlands aren't far behind. With time, these tannins melt into satisfying dry savouriness. A few weeks ago, Western Australian journalist Peter Forrestal treated me to a 1986 Moss Wood Cabernet: the greatest single bottle of my time in Australia so far, and a complex, allusive and supremely drinkable red wine of sane balance and lingering textures.

Frankland is a lonely, distant and dryer spot inland: Riesling and Shiraz country.

The Rieslings are haunting, abstract (forget that Clare Valley citrus pith), restrained and unapologetically intellectual. The Frankland River Estate trio of intricate Isolation Ridge, doughy Poison Hill and the almost floral Cooladerra Vineyard make the point. Frankland's best Shirazes for me are those of Larry Cherubino, not least because he too is unafraid of ripe, mouth-cleansing, grape-skin tannins, bonding them to ripe, sensually compelling fruits with natural harvest balance ('making wines like this would have frightened me 10 years ago'). The 2007 and 2008 under his own name represent his best blocks and parcels, but the 2007 The Yard, Acacia Vineyard is also savoury, textured and startlingly original.

Original... yes. Maybe that's Western Australia's final asset: the fact that it's so far from anywhere else. There's no wine-industry mindset here. No one disdains sorting tables as unnecessary; not everyone machine harvests and chucks their grapes into a half-ton bin. People try things; it might just work. They've tried Viognier, for example, in the warmer regions between Perth and the south, and it's alluringly sultry, as the Perth Hills version of Millbrook and the Geographe version of Capel Vale proves. Mike Peterkin's Pierro Chardonnay is almost as unfruity as great Meursault, full of oatmeal and hazel. That's the way he likes it; me too. And there's something supremely Way Out West about Bill Pannell, who founded Moss Wood, one of Australia's greatest Cabernet estates, then upped and left because of a Pinot infatuation. The estate he now runs with his son Dan in damper, cooler Pemberton is called Picardy. Their immaculately tended vineyards produce graceful, mouthfilling Pinot of authentic poise and fragrance.

As Harold Olmo predicted and John Gladstones spelled out, this ancient crumb of the continent does indeed produce fine wine – thanks to winemakers whose horizons are, of acute geographical necessity, broad. **D**

Andrew Jefford is spending a year in Australia researching terroir. His monthly column reports back on his experiences

WHAT ANDREW'S BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH...

BIRTHDAY BURGUNDIES

I happened to visit Jeff Burch of Howard Park on his birthday. Stay to dinner, he said. Little did I know, Jeff had already pulled out **Rousseau's 1993 Chambertin** and the **2000 DRC Richebourg** to precede **1982 Margaux** and **1959 Latour**; he later added an **1988 DRC Echézeaux**

(to settle an argument about the vintage) and a **1982 Pichon-Lalande**. Burch's own Burgundophilia is coming to fruition with some exuberant, vivacious Pinots crafted with Pascal Marchand in Western Australia's Mount Barker: generous wines from a generous man.