

The Border Mail

TOP DROP  with David Sutherland

Magic waiting to happen

SEMILLON has a bit of an image problem in Australia, or at least in Victoria. The grape has never really developed in popularity to the extent that it should.

Probably its main problem is that it is a non-fruity variety that produces wines which can be fairly underwhelming when young. If you were to give someone a taste of one or two-year-old Hunter semillon as well as a taste of Marlborough sauvignon blanc, there is no doubt in my mind which one at least 90 per cent of tasters would choose.

The poor wine just doesn't have a chance, as it is a bit of a spotty adolescent in its infancy and, in the case of serious Hunter wines, they really need at least 10 years in the bottle to start displaying potential with the marvellous toasty citrus marmalade characters for which that style of wine is famous, and even great examples aren't to everyone's taste!

Let's be honest, Hunter semillon can be like battery acid when young, which is precisely what it should be like when picked at under 10 baume of potential alcohol with searing acidity and oh-so-subtle fruit. The magic happens in the bottle-ageing phase.

Many young Hunter semillons are now made in a slightly more approachable, softer and more fruity,

style than the orthodox style, allowing them to drunk at an earlier age. But they are still very subtle and non-fruity and certainly dry, rather European in style, reminding me of quite a lot of Italian and Spanish dry whites I have enjoyed over the years.

They are usually good with food, so much better than Kiwi sauv blanc!

And then we have the semillons from South Australia. Mainly from the Clare and the Barossa, these wines are usually riper with more fruit character, often with oak influence, certainly more alcohol and therefore texture than their Hunter counterparts, making them a little more accessible when young. They still age well but probably not to the degree of the classic Hunter products, which in many ways is no disadvantage.

Some of my favourites from the Clare include Mitchell, Mt Horrocks, Tim Adams and Cardinham Estate and from the Barossa, seek out Bethany, Peter Lehmann, Kaesler Wines and Burge Family Winemakers.

Tyrrells, Keith Tulloch, McWilliams, and Brokenwood are some great names to start with in terms of quality Hunter semillon but you will need to find their top wines with at least a little age to fully experience the magic.

mt eyre three ponds semillon, 2011, \$20

Made by Mount Eyr Vineyards, which has vineyards in both Broke and Pokolbin in the Hunter Valley, this is a semillon in the Hunter-style although it's a touch richer.

Un-oaked and fermented in stainless steel after early picking, it is delightfully fresh and crisp with the required acidity for the style, vivacious citrus and straw fruit flavours and aromas, with a lovely minerality on the palate.

in a word: classical

