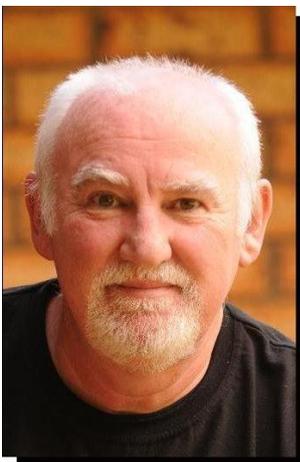


The Key Review of Wine

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Honest assessment of all wines

A Key Report Publication issue 38



Give or take a tonne or three, Australia produces about 400,000 tonnes of shiraz grapes a year. Again, give or take a bottle or eight, that is 28.9 million cases of wine. The quality range covers the spectrum from Penfolds Grange and Henschke Hill of Grace down to bulk wine that in all honesty should be poured down the drain.

Adding to the confusion shiraz is grown and turned into wine in most if not all Australian wine regions. How can sense be made out of wine that covers every part of the quality spectrum and every part of Australian vineyard country?

Below are about 60 shiraz wines from several regions. They have been tasted over the past few months. Hopefully this will shed some light on the confusion of Australian shiraz; then again it may not.

How I mark

Marking wines can be an emotive issue and there is no enforceable rule on what scale should be used. I use the 100 scale for quality rating devised by American critic Robert Parker. The Australian show system uses marks out of 20; several writers use stars or symbols, many out of five. I consider a wine of average quality to be 85 and, believe me, there is nothing wrong with a wine earning 85 points.

In truth, the value of a wine is directly related to the wealth of the drinker. Those with untold millions in the bank may think nothing of drinking bottles worth hundreds of dollars/pounds/Euros, while those with an overdraft and more pressing financial matters might find spending over \$10, £5 or €10 an unjustifiable expense.

With regard to value for money, wine can be divided into two sections: those up to 100 dollars/pounds/Euros and those over. Once a wine is over this amount, then scarcity, fashion or plain pomposity is what you're paying for.

Up to that amount there really is a quality-to-value ratio. The hard part is expressing the value. I've experimented with charts and held long debates about a critic's role in pricing. Many reviewers make no comment; others use symbols. The most honest system I can think of is plain opinion (mine). When I look at the price of a wine, it's the one the winery has sent me. Often they can be found cheaper on special. I judge value for money by comparing wines in the same peer group. When I say "works better with food" it's because I have tasted it on the bench and then with food, as certain wines often taste better in this context.

The Meaning of**TOP KEY**.....

When a wine hits the right spot words don't always come to mind it's just an inner feeling. Those that affect me in that way have TOP KEY accompanying them. Note they are not always the ones with the highest scores it's a personal preference.

Hunter Valley

The Hunter Valley Geographical Indication (GI) is huge. What used to be known as Upper Hunter is now equal to Lower Hunter. There is a difference and I feel the Lower Hunter should be more defined and recognisable to consumers. The official explanation is that Upper and Lower are “geographically linked by the umbilical cord of the Hunter River”. Total rubbish in wine terms and Wine Australia and its pathetic and gutless GI department should be ashamed of itself for allowing it.

James Estate ‘Reserve’ Hunter Valley (Upper) Shiraz 2009: Good, well-made shiraz but lacks the Lower Hunter earthiness. Still rates 92 points and is very good value at \$23. www.jamesestatewines.com.au

James Estate ‘Reserve’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2007: Also from the Upper Hunter. Much the same as above, just older, so more settled. Same mark, 92, and still value at \$23. www.jamesestatewines.com.au

Tower Estate Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009: “Dusty earth and licorice are the highlighting characters,” say the accompanying tasting notes. I go along with dusty earth but not the licorice. On tasting, the dusty earth turns into dusty oak and is more obvious than I like. It is not as savoury as I like Hunter shiraz to be. It is well made but interest wanes as the wine is consumed. 89 points. Expensive at \$38. www.towerestate.com

Margan Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009: Very sound Hunter shiraz, good and earthy. 90 points and worth its \$20. www.margan.com.au

Tyrrell’s ‘Brokenback’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009: More fruit on the nose and palate than one would expect from a Hunter Valley shiraz but then it is only \$20 and I am being pernickety. It’s still earthy enough and more austere than the rich chocolate/fruitcake offerings from Barossa or McLaren Vale (all have their place). Alcohol content of 12.9 per cent is light in today’s reckoning but it loses nothing in flavour, length or finish. 92 points and very good value. www.tyrrells.com.au

Brokenwood ‘Mistress Block Vineyard’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009: Light to start but then opens up in the middle. Oak comes into play towards the end and I think at this stage of its life spoils the finish. For me it’s not as good as the Verona vineyard (see below). 92 points and very expensive at \$65. www.brokenwood.com.au

Three Ponds Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Slightly lighter than some Hunter shiraz but still with that wild, grown-up taste that many people can’t get to grips with. Plenty of fruit but it’s not fat and full-on. Gorgeous wine; 93 with ease and a great bargain at \$25. www.mounteyre.com

Meerea Park ‘Terracotta’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... The nose is bramble and damp earth; put another way, it smells of English countryside. Tight to start in the mouth but slowly opens, still a few raw edges that I hope time will smooth out, but quite some wine. 93 now, with perhaps four more points to come. The price of \$60 seems a lot in Australian terms but I have tasted French Rhone three times the price and half the quality. www.meereapark.com.au

Meerea Park ‘XYZ’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... All savoury, earthy, lovely Hunter stuff. 93 points and very worth its \$25. www.meereapark.com.au

Tyrrell’s ‘Vat 8’ Hunter Shiraz 2007: Very chewy and thought-provoking wine. Dark fruits on the nose, more earth on the palate. Though three years old it’s still a little disjointed but such promise is waiting in the wings. 94 now with one or two more points to come. I think on the pricy side at \$75 but still a \$50-plus wine www.tyrrells.com.au

Three Ponds ‘Holman’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009: It’s made to age, but is drinking well at the moment and one can see the potential, though I’m not sure of the 25 years the maker claims; it’s a wait-and-see game. Very well put together and hits the right spots as it travels. 94 points, putting it among the best in its price range at \$45. www.mounteyre.com

Brokenwood ‘Verona Vineyard’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Classic, beautiful Hunter shiraz. Earthy nose followed by slightly bitter dark fruit flavours. Great depth, long length and a wonderful finish. 95 points and worth its \$50. www.brokenwood.com.au

Margan ‘White Label’ Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009: The notes clearly say “made to cellar” and it is; the first smell/taste was oak and hard edge. After 24 hours of letting the air get to it, the wine had softened and was tantalisingly showing its promise. Tasted on the day, its drinkability was 90 and only that because the class was showing through. Do as advised and put it away and it will pass 95 as an investment in drinking pleasure. It is worth its \$50. www.margan.com.au

Brokenwood ‘Graveyard Vineyard’ Hunter Vineyard Shiraz 2009: It’s very concentrated but not high alcohol at 13.5 per cent. Nor does it have the classic Hunter character but it hints of it; I think it has a long way to go. Among this tight structure is a beauty waiting to emerge; simply a stunning wine. 95 now and more to come as it opens. Not for everyday drinking at \$150 but for those that can put away the great wines of the world and have the money to do so it is worth it. www.brokenwood.com.au

Summary

The savoury adult flavours of Hunter Valley shiraz are very much to my taste. My scores reflect this. Preference for a style will emerge whether wines are tasted masked or not.

As can be seen in the first table below, my range of points ran from 89 to 95. As a good average wine is 85, these in my opinion are way above average. Almost half the wines are very reasonably priced at \$25 or below.

Australia needs several top-end wines to represent her in the global market. If trying to match price to taste one could say the Brokenwood 'Verona Vineyard' is equal to the Brokenwood 'Graveyard'. The impossible question to answer is how will both be looking in 10 years? Also look at the Margan 'White Label' Hunter Valley Shiraz 2009. It gets a score of 90 now but the quality is there for the future.

Tyrrell's makes wonderful wines and has nudged its prices up in recent years as its reputation grows. It's the right thing to do even if it removes some of the wines from our everyday drinking budget. If looking for bargains, seek out the Three Ponds wines or the cheaper Meerea Park offerings.

The second table below shows the price of Hunter Valley shiraz grapes in 2011 and the percentage share. For those not familiar with profitable grape production this shows that that good returns have been achieved in 2011 for shiraz.

The price of grapes is extremely important, more so than most consumers realise. It's all well and good enjoying cheap wine but the low prices that are around now are not sustainable. The simple logic being unless grape growers can make enough on their grapes to support the family and reinvest, vineyards will close down. If there is then an undersupply of grapes wine will increase in price, perhaps enough to take it out of a family's budget.

Of course there is a global surplus and with a strong Australian dollar what might bring wine back into an Australian family's budget is imported wine. The UK has always benefited from not being a major producer and consumer. Loyalty is to price and if Australia can't meet the price that supermarkets dictate then another country will.

The big arrears of Australian wine production are Riverina, Murray Darling-Swan Hill (Murray Valley) and Riverland. To get a return on a large well-run vineyard across the board (all varieties) \$350 a tonne is needed. In 2011 47 per cent of Riverina grapes averaged \$191 a tonne and 35 per cent \$269 a tonne. In the Murray Valley 61 per cent averaged \$210 and 32 per cent \$252. In the Riverland 81 per cent averaged just \$231 and a further 8 per cent pulled in \$258.

I am fully aware that figures are boring for many but believe me what these figures are showing is a wine industry in dire straits. The cost of growing grapes varies in each region. At the present time the most profitable place to grow grapes in Australia is Tasmania, where 100 percent of the crop averaged more than \$2000 a tonne.

Total wines 14	Lowest score 89		Highest score 95		Lowest price \$20	Highest price \$150
	85-90 =2		91-93 =7		94-96 =5	97-100 =0
Price \$/tonne	800/850	850/900	900/950	1150/1200	1200/1250	
% share	4	6	24	10	10	
Average \$/tonne	800	850	900	1160	1200	
Price \$/tonne	1250/1300	1400/1450	1550/1600	1600/1650	2000 plus	
% share	17	4	21	2	3	
Average \$/tonne	1250	1400	1560	1600	2746	

Orange & Hill Tops

Green-Skins Orange Region Shiraz 2008: The green refers to organic, which is fine but this is not well-put-together wine. It's a thick, old-fashioned style and organic or not it's not of a standard that consumers are used to in 2011. 83 points and not worth its \$15. www.theorganicwinemERCHANTS.com.au

Ross Hill 'Pinnacle Series' Orange Region Shiraz 2009: Interesting new wine has something going for it but that doesn't include the price; \$40 may be justifiable in the proprietor's mind but there are a lot better wines out there for that. 89 points. www.rosshillwines.com.au

Moppity Vineyards 'Lock & Key' Hilltops Shiraz 2009: A cool style of shiraz, as fits its origins, and very well made. A pleasure to drink and at \$15 a snip. 91 points. www.moppity.com.au

Barwang Hilltops Shiraz 2009: Very interesting nose, slightly herbal but hard (for me) to define; however it's not unpleasant. Tight in the mouth to start but flavours do unfold as it travels. Definitely cool-climate shiraz as it is coy up front but there's plenty there behind when it emerges. 93 points and extremely good value at \$20. www.mcwilliams.com.au

Tower Estate 'Freeman Vineyard' Hilltops Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Tower Estate makes many wines from various regions across Australia. All are of a standard but this one really shines. It's a beauty; so incredibly elegant. A fulfilling glass of wine without stamping over the palate in hobnailed boots. 95 points and worth its \$30. www.towerestatewines.com.au

Summary

Orange and Hilltops are producing some excellent wines and it's a region worth watching for future gems. But not all is smooth going. Look at the prices the fruit fetched: 20 per cent of it at an average of \$200. That means the grapes were grown at below the cost of production. The question is why? The fruit that went into the Green-skins must have been of very low quality; the wine was horrid. At the other end the Tower Estate wine was very good and the Barwang the outstanding buy.

Total wines 5	Lowest score 83	Highest score 95	Lowest price \$15	Highest price \$40
	80-85 = 1	89-91 = 2	93-95 = 2	96-100 = 0

Price \$/tonne	0-250	500-550	550-600	700-750	750-800	800-850	950-1000
% share	20	15	7	6	6	27	18
Average \$/tonne	200	500	560	700	750	801	993

Barossa Valley

Jacob's Creek 'Centenary Hill Barossa Shiraz 2006: Daft to say but "very Barossa". For me it's the bramble and black fruit on the nose and touch of chocolate on the palate. Apart from that there are several layers of flavour, rather like filters, each one slowly revealing itself. It's drinking really well at the moment but still has life. A very good wine. 94 points. Not convinced it's a \$60 wine but it's certainly a \$45-\$50 wine. www.jaccobscreek.com

Yalumba 'Patchwork' Barossa Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Quite the dusky beauty. Strong yet subtle flavours work their way around the mouth. It tastes full but is only 13.5 per cent alcohol. Easy 93 and outstanding value at \$22. www.yalumba.com

Yalumba 'The Octavius' Old Vine Barossa Shiraz 2006:TOP KEY..... Take the best grapes from top vineyards and old vines combined with careful handling. It results in quite a breathtaking creation. This is drinking well at the moment but it's a pity to do so. It's already a 95 wine but three more points (I think) will come its way as it passes the 10-year mark. If \$110 is within the budget then it's worth it. If not, buy five of the 'Patchwork' reviewed above. www.yalumba.com

Yalumba 'Galway Vintage' Shiraz 2010: Very sound wine, as it has been for decades. 90 points and worth \$16. www.yalumba.com

Zilzie 'Regional Collection' Barossa Shiraz 2009: Has the Barossa's slight hint of chocolate character. Very light in the mouth but no great distinction in any department. 87 points. It's only \$16 but there is a lot available at this price point. www.zilziewines.com

Elderton 'Command' Barossa Shiraz 2007: Am I getting too old to drink such big wines? I think so. It's all it should be and fortunately I was drinking it in company and they raved about it, collectively awarding it 94 points. On a personal level I'm three points down on that. \$95 is a lot of money and I'm sure some will pay it but I can think of three wines I could buy for the same amount and enjoy more. www.eldertonwines.com.au

St John's Road 'Blood & Courage' Barossa Valley Shiraz 2009: I found it rather un-Barossa-like, and was surprised to see it carrying 14.5 per cent alcohol. Very smooth, easy flowing across the palate and silky finish. Impressive stuff. 93 points and good value at \$22. www.stjohnsroad.com

Grant Burge 'The Filsell' Barossa Shiraz 2009: Apart from a touch of raw oak it's a seductive shiraz with rich, broad flavours all the way. 92 points. Pricy at \$40. www.grantburgewines.com.au

Grant Burge 'The Meshach' Barossa Shiraz 2006: Dark as midnight, earthy/leather nose and beautiful construction. It sits proud at the front of the palate then strolls across, releasing tasters of further enjoyment to come. I find each release getting better; this is wonderful wine. 96 points and more to come as it ages. Worth its \$155. www.grantburgewines.com.au

Zeppelin 'Big Bertha' Barossa Valley Shiraz 2009: The accompanying notes say "medium to full bodied with dark berry flavours, a seductive fruit sweetness and soft savoury tannins". I fully agree. It's all it should be. 93 points and at \$17 good value. www.echelonwine.com.au

Zeppelin 'Ferdinand' Barossa Valley Shiraz 2009: Let's cut to the chase. As a wine within its style it is 93 points and expensive at \$38. I am past big, monster, jammy, cloying Barossa shiraz and I enjoyed the 'Big Bertha' more. www.echelonwine.com.au

Elderton Eden Valley Shiraz 2010: Very cool tasting, as per the region. Slightly tart but not a bad drop. 90 points and OK value at \$19. www.eldertonwines.com.au

Berton Vineyards 'Bonsai' High Eden Valley Shiraz 2007: Top of the Burton range, this is well put together and restrained, reflecting its cooler climate. An admission I'm not happy to make is I tasted this over three days because although I think it good and give it an easy 91, something is missing and I can't put my finger (or palate) on it. Maybe others will spot what I can't and mark it higher. I think it expensive at \$60. www.bertonvineyards.com.au

Summary

The Barossa Valley is for many consumers the centre of Australian wine and the homeland of shiraz. The need now is to get across the message (without putting the Barossa down) that there are many other regions and numerous styles of shiraz.

Within the Barossa various sub-regional characters are being explored and individual vineyard (or sub-regional) wines being made (Yalumba and Ch Tanunda leading the way).

As I age I'm finding the full-on richness combined with high alcohol just too much for my taste. Sometimes if I struggle with a wine I will ask others their view; hence the wine will have two scores (see Elderton 'Command').

The scores show all wines performing above average and all but one scoring 90 and over. The prices are reflective of the valley's reputation and the price that grapes command (see second table). Six of the wines are around the \$20 mark, a couple near or on \$40, one at \$60 and three close to or over \$100.

Looking at the grape prices, the zero represents less than 1 per cent at that price. The big price chunk is 17 per cent at an average of \$600 but 50 per cent of Barossa shiraz managed to get between \$1000 and \$1500 a tonne. The most impressive figure is 7 per cent over \$2000 a tonne.

Total wines 13	Lowest score 87	Highest score 96	Lowest price \$16	Highest price \$155
	85-89 = 1	90-93 = 8	94-95 = 3	96-100 = 1

Price \$/tonne	300-350	350-400	450-500	500-550	600-650	650-700	700-750	800-850	900-950
% share	0	0	0	3	17	0	1	1	0
Average \$/tonne	300	362	497	513	600	687	704	801	910
Price \$/tonne	950-1000	1000-1050	1050-1100	1100-1150	1150-1200	1200-1250	1250-1300	1300-1350	1350-1400
% share	0	14	1	10	8	3	1	12	4
Ave \$ per tonne	970	1000	1085	1101	1170	1203	1270	1301	1356
Price \$/tonne	1400-1450	1450-1500	1500-1550	1550-1600	1600-1650	1700-1750	1800-1850	1950-2000	2000+
% share	5	1	2	0	9	0	0	0	7
Ave \$ per tonne	1412	1465	1501	1554	1600	1700	1820	1999	2643

Langhorne Creek

Killibinbin Langhorne Creek Shiraz 2007: It's a great label but then labels are like or dislike so that plays no part in the wine. It's big at 15.5 per cent but carries it well. Buxom and flavoursome is a simple description. 90 points and pushing it at \$30.

www.brothersinarms.com.au

Killibinbin Langhorne Creek Blend 2007: A shiraz (90 per cent) and cabernet (10 per cent) mix, this is enjoyable on the whole but lacks interest and definition. 90 points and \$25 is more than I want to pay for this style of wine. www.brothersinarms.com.au

Brothers in Arms 'No.6' Langhorne Creek Shiraz 2007: Slice of shiraz, anybody? Goodness, it's a big, rich wine. A little too rich and heavy for me, but it will have its followers. I can think of some friends who will love it. 91 points. In the right price zone at \$23 although I would pick something less weighty. www.brothersinarms.com.au

Brothers in Arms Langhorne Creek Shiraz 2006: It's \$45 and I can't drink it. That is no criticism of the wine making or the wine, as those I shared it with found it rich, ripe and a full expression of what wine should be. OK, I admit to being a wimp but I don't want to fight when I drink. In fairness I give it 93 but can think of two other bottles of wine I would buy for \$45, so for me this is grossly expensive. www.brothersinarms.com.au

Summary

There are only four wines so it would be unfair to say this is a full conclusion. As can be seen by my comments above and from other reviews I have written in the past, they are too huge and jam-laden for me to get great enjoyment in drinking them. Not that the region should be written off, as many like wine with plenty of body and a lot of the region's production provides the backbone for Jacob's Creek.

In 2011 34 per cent of shiraz grapes went at \$350 a tonne or below; 37 per cent were in the \$400-\$500 bracket. In the next bracket 25 per cent fetched between \$600-\$900 so a total of 96 per cent of Langhorne Creek shiraz grapes were below \$1000 a tonne, which if compared to some of the other regions in this report, says something. Just 3 per cent were between \$1000 and \$2000 and 1 per cent over \$2000.

Coonawarra

Majella Coonawarra Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... I don't always pick up on it but this wine just smells Coonawarra. It's Majella all the way. High quality, 94 points and value for money at \$28. www.majellawines.com.au

Summary: Strange there is only one Coonawarra shiraz but I don't dictate how the samples arrive and I didn't ask for any shiraz to be sent specially for this review. Although Coonawarra is noted for its cabernet sauvignon, more than 75 per cent of the 2011 shiraz achieved prices of \$1000 tonne and above.

Adelaide Hills

Nepenthe Adelaide Hills Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Hmm, interesting wine, this. There's little on the nose and not much of the Aussie generosity we have come to expect from the variety. But then they do say, "cool climate" and this accounts for the rather tight structure. The flavour spectrum is also tight; it's a wine that depends on the response of the drinker (I know, don't they all). The point being, I rather enjoyed this, but others didn't. It's well made, flows easily across the palate and rates 91 according to my companions (personally 93). Whatever the score, it's worth its \$20 and goes better with food. www.nepenthe.com.au

Mr Riggs 'Piebald' Adelaide Hills Shiraz Viognier 2009:TOP KEY..... A slinky character but still coming in at 14.5 per cent alcohol. Damson is the fruit that comes to mind but more impressive is this being elegant wine despite its strength. 94 points and worth its \$25. www.mrriggs.com.au

Summary: With only two wines there is not a lot to summarise, many fantastic wines coming out of the hills and overall grape prices are not too bad; however the costs of growing grapes in the region is high

McLaren Vale

Shingleback 'The Gate' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2006:TOP KEY..... The notes that came with the sample said complexity, powerful fruit and density; no need for me to add more except it is very good wine. 95 points and good value at \$35. If you think \$35 is

a lot for a bottle of wine then so be it; what makes this value is that there are many \$50 wines not as good. www.shingleback.com.au

Shingleback 'The Gate' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... I could give it a different tasting note than the above wine, but let's not bother. It's sharper around the edge but that is youth and it drops a point for being so. 94 points but still excellent value at \$35. www.shingleback.com.au

Shingleback McLaren Vale Shiraz 2007: Solid Shingleback quality, it's hard to beat. Very enjoyable and classy wine. 93 points and worth its \$25. www.shingleback.com.au

Shingleback 'Red Knot' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2010: The everyday offering at under \$15, it is silky, well balanced and a joy to drink. 91 points and the usual Shingleback high standard. www.shingleback.com.au

Chapel Hill 'The Vicar' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2008: Strong wine. Very tight, needs time but all the elements are there. 90 now but I should thing five or six more points to come with age. Pricy at \$60. www.chapelhillwine.com.au

Dowie Doole McLaren Vale Shiraz 2009: A smooth drop with a few deeper and more interesting flavours. Easy ride across the palate. 92 points and within bounds at \$25. www.dowiedoole.com

Chapel Hill 'Parsons Nose' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2010: Young and plump and rather delicious. I really did enjoy this and it's not a complex wine. 91 points and great value at \$16. www.chapelhillwine.com.au

Mitolo 'Jester' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... The nose is a bit of earth overridden with rich fruitcake. It's just starting to come into its own, puppy fat has been cast off and it's settling down for a good, fit life. 94 points and worth its \$28. www.mitolowines.com.au

Oliver's Taranga Vineyards 'HJ Reserve' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2008: On tasting it was just too much oak and hard edges. Left a day it softened out but it's still a big wine in all departments; one can see the quality but I admit to being unsure when it will come around. To drink tonight it's a 90-point wine but there is more there if cellared. Therefore \$50 has to be worthwhile for those putting the wine away. www.oliverstaranga.com

Brokenwood 'Wade Block 2 Vineyard' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2007:TOP KEY..... A very classy wine. Has the richness of McVale on one level but there is also a lot happening on another level. It twists and turns across the palate, with flavours mixing and separating. Very intriguing. 95 points and a top price at \$45 but worth it. www.brokenwood.com.au

Fox Creek 'Reserve' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2007:TOP KEY..... Opulent on the nose, black as night in the glass and like velvet as it slides across the palate. Plenty of deep underlying flavours that intrigue and are enjoyable. Built to age, it already rates 94 points with more to come. Worth its \$70. www.foxcreekwines.com

Chapel Hill 'The Chosen House Block' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Beautiful bramble nose, nice and tight in the mouth with adult flavours. I think this wine has some life in it yet. At the moment it's worth 94 points and although pricy at \$55 it is within bounds for top-end wine. www.chapelhillwine.com.au

Chapel Hill 'The Chosen Road Block' McLaren Vale Shiraz 2009: Richer chocolate nose, richer ripe plum flavours, more approachable than the 'House Block', it's a lovely drop. 95 now but I don't think it will develop as well as the other. However, who knows? Only time will tell for those interested in the top end of wine. Worth its \$55. www.chapelhillwine.com.au

Summary

McLaren Vale slogs it out with the Barossa Valley to be Australian shiraz supremo. In this random tasting of wines the Vale wins (just), having eight wines in the 94-95 section against the Barossa that only had three. But then the Vale didn't make a 96 score. Nor did it drop below 90.

The grape price per tonne comparison is interesting. The Vale had 7 per cent of its fruit fetching below \$600 tonne whereas the Valley only had a very small amount. At \$1000 a tonne both Vale and Valley had about the same amount: 14-15 per cent The strong point for the Vale was between \$1100 and \$1500 with 32 per cent of shiraz grapes in that bracket. But the Valley beat it with 45 per cent in that bracket. What is to be noted is that 14 per cent of Vale shiraz over 7 per cent from the Valley sold at \$2000 or over.

Total wines 13	Lowest score 90	Highest score 95	Lowest price \$15	Highest price \$70
	Below 90 =0	90-93 =6	94-95 =7	96-100 =0

Price \$/tonne	300-350	500-550	550-600	600-650	650-700	700-750	750-800	800-850	850-900	900-950	950-1000	1000-1050
% share	5	2	1	13	0	1	4	7	2	1	1	15
Ave \$ per tonne	300	508	550	600	688	707	750	800	856	905	967	1000

Price \$/tonne	1100-1150	1150-1200	1200-1250	1300-1350	1350-1400	1400-1450	1500-1550	1600-1650	1750-1800	1800-1850	1850-1900	2000+
% share	15	4	5	3	1	1	3	2	0	1	0	14
Average \$/tonne	1100	1150	1200	1340	1364	1408	1511	1603	1750	1800	1890	2785

Clare Valley

Reilly's 'Rockridge' Clare Valley Shiraz 2008: Rounded but not over-plump. A good, lip-smacking mouthful, welcome on a cold winter's evening. 92 points and worth its \$15. www.reillyswines.com.au

Reilly's 'Dry Land' Clare Valley Shiraz 2007: Slight medicinal nose; very spicy on the palate, good long finish. 93 points and worth its \$21. www.reillyswines.com.au

Leasingham 'Bin 61' Clare Valley Shiraz 2008: I found this difficult to come to grips with at first tasting so put it aside. Coming back to the wine it is an individual style and a good one. It is tight and slightly tart, a wine with bite and better if a bite of tucker accompanies it. 93 points and worth its \$26. www.leasingham-wines.com.au

Summary: Only three wines but two at 93 and one at 92 shows well for the region, where 34 per cent of the fruit sold in the \$450 to \$950 range and 64 per cent in the \$1000 to \$1500 bracket. A small percentage went for a little higher and 3 per cent made it over \$2000 a tonne.

Victoria

The Victorian shirazes are from many regions so it's not practical to analyse the price of grapes. Quality comparisons between the regions are also difficult because there are so few wines. In short, read the reviews and make up your own mind.

BlackJack 'Major's Line' Bendigo Shiraz 2008: Powerful nose (it could be smelt across the room), it is dusty, dry Victorian bush land (in a good way) and different. In the accompanying notes the word "robust" is used and I see no reason to deviate from it. It is 14 per cent alcohol but today that is not monster wine. I enjoyed its fullness and went back to it several times to see if there was more to it; in no way is it elegant but it's very sturdy and with different and interesting flavours and I suspect people will describe those flavours in very different ways. 91 points and worth its \$25 for those into the style. www.blackjackwines.net.au

Ladies Who Shoot Their Lunch Strathbogie Ranges Shiraz 2009: Creamy cool-climate shiraz, good but not overly exciting, which is a shame as I remember the 2006 being a stunning wine. Let's hope it picks up next vintage. 91 points and plenty of competition at \$35. www.ladieswhoshoot.com

Robert Oatley Ovens Valley Shiraz 2008: This was a blast from the past. Wynns Ovens Valley Shiraz was a great value wine in the 1960s and into the '80s. James Halliday wrote in 1982: "As a style it is one of Australia's unsung heroes." He went on to praise the 1978 vintage, on sale then at \$3.70. Darren Jahn from Oatley told me the grapes come from "one of two vineyards we've secured pretty much on either side of Myrtleford, this one from Nicholson (owned by the Mayfords, which I incorrectly listed as Mayfield on the label) and the other McNamara, which we understand to have supplied fruit to the old Wynns wine. From what I can tell they stopped making it after Vintage 1990." Enough of the history. What is it like now? It's still an individual style and leans towards the rustic rather than elegant, but it's still damn good. 92 points but pushing price limits considering what else can be had for \$35. www.robertoatley.com.au

Domaine Chandon Heathcote Shiraz 2009: I thought this light for a Heathcote shiraz and that is no criticism, just confirmation that

after years of tasting surprises are still to be had (wonderful). I also found that it came to life slowly but all parts were there and a good job was achieved. 93 points. OK at \$34 but I think several others better in the same price bracket. www.domainechandon.com.au

All Saints 'Family Cellar' Rutherglen Shiraz 2008: Very smooth in all departments. Sits on the side of fruit rather than savoury, therefore is not as appealing to my palate as to others'. However, it is top quality wine, very well made. 93 from me although I think others might score it higher. The price at \$50 is high and I would look for more earthy tastes. www.allsaintswine.com.au

Paradigm Hill 'Col's Block' Mornington Peninsula Shiraz 2008:TOP KEY..... Unlike pinot grigio/gris, as yet no one (as far as I know) has attempted to define shiraz/syrah. Not that it matters but I think of this style more as syrah. The weight is different and it's more of a earthy wine, savoury instead of sweet. All good, in fact very good. 94 points and worth the money asked: \$45. www.morningtonpeninsulawineries.com.au/paradigm-hill

Mount Avoca Pyrenees Shiraz 2009:TOP KEY..... Winemaker John Harris has done a first-rate job on this wine. It has strength and flavour without being heavy and cloying. For me this is stunning wine. 95 points and well worth its \$27. www.mountavoca.com

Summary: All wines are 91 or above so the average quality is good. They also cover the most of the taste spectrum, stopping just short of some of the big Barossa boys. The Mount Avoca did it for me, with the Paradigm Hill close behind; if any readers have tasted any of these wines and would like to compare notes and scores, please write in.

Western Australia

In a recent article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* Huon Hooke wrote about the quality shiraz that is coming out of Margaret River, pointing out that the region is seen as a cabernet sauvignon producer so shiraz often gets left out. I do agree with him. Unfortunately I only have four WA shirazes so not enough to demonstrate either way.

Only two of the below are from Margaret River and neither set my tastebuds tingling. However, from further south the two Plantagenet wines were gorgeous.

The average price of Margaret River fruit is high but the strain of oversupply is showing even in one of Australia's prestigious regions. Of the 2011 vintage, 6 per cent fetched \$200 a tonne. Admittedly the rest went at \$600 and above, with the biggest chunk (68 per cent) fetching between \$1450 and \$1850 a tonne.

Down south the prices started at \$750 a tonne, with most of the crop fetching \$990-\$1000 a tonne.

Plantagenet 'Great Southern' Shiraz 2008:TOP KEY..... Hints of chocolate and coffee on the nose, which I find unusual in shiraz from this region. However, no great problem as it has attractive, lovely earthy flavours in the mouth and is very long on the finish. A true beauty. 94 points and worth its \$45. www.plantagenetwines.com

Plantagenet 'Omrah' Great Southern Shiraz 2008:TOP KEY..... It's \$18 and worth every cent. Soft and plummy to start but firms up in the middle and ends wonderfully. 92 points. www.plantagenetwines.com

Forester Estate Margaret River Shiraz 2008: Pepper is often used to describe the nose of shiraz. I don't often find it but I do on this wine, which has a white pepper nose. It's an easy style, not showing much. An OK wine. I wouldn't feel robbed paying \$20 retail for this but would if I paid \$40-plus in a restaurant. Even at \$20 I wouldn't go back and buy a second bottle. 87 points. www.foresterestate.com.au

Madfish 'Sideways' Margaret River Shiraz 2009: The notes say "sweet rich fruit" but I found it hard to find the sweet. The "savoury edge" the notes refer to was more savoury than I like and I do like savoury. From a maker I rate among the best in Australia I was a little disappointed. 89 points. Not overpriced at \$22 but I wouldn't go for a second. www.madfishwines.com.au

Enough from me on shiraz, and pricing. The rest you can work out for yourself.

Happy drinking.

Tony

Reminder: Address for wine samples:

**Tony Keys
PO Box 134
Bangalow
2479 NSW**

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Email Tony Keys: tony@thekeyreport.com.au
Phone: 0438184569**

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