Snippets from Australia, 2002

22 Nov 2004 by JR

- Look out for 2002s

  After a couple of rather dodgy wet vintages in South Australia and a 2001 that was if anything too hot in the Barossa, 2002 has turned out to be a stupendous vintage in south-east Australia. (WA is so many thousands of miles away, it of course follows quite different vintage patterns.)

  I have already tasted some very fine 2002 whites such as Grosset's Riesling and Shaw & Smith's Sauvignon Blanc, but perhaps the most exciting thing for budget-conscious wine drinkers is that the quality in the inland irrigated areas which fill the bulk of Australia's cheaper bottles was so exceptionally good. These wines should start to appear on shelves in the northern hemisphere any minute. At the bottom end there is still, thanks to red wine tunnel vision when it came to planning the recent new plantings, a shortage of Chardonnay grapes - but the combination of 2002's quality, increasingly sophisticated winemaking and a weak Australian dollar should make basic Australian Shiraz and Cabernet much better buys over the coming year. And, with new plantings of such exotica as Tempranillo, Petit Verdot and Nero d'Avola emerging even from the Riverland, the spread of varietals [NB correct usage of this word] on offer should widen considerably.

- Mount Langi Ghiran sold

  One of my favourite Victorian producers has been sold to the Rathbone family which acquired the historic Yering Station in the Yarra Valley, also in the Australian state of Victoria, in 1996. Now that Darren Rathbone and his family have put part of their chemicals-based fortune into two high-profile wine properties, the company is known as the Rathbone Family group. Talented Mount Langi winemaker Trevor Mast is reported to be staying on and continuing his remarkably consistent run with labels such as Cliff Edge and Billi Billi Creek, as well as Mount Langi Ghiran's wines of which the particularly dense, savoury Shiraz has always been the star.

  Ex-Sichel Australian wine enthusiast Riquet Hess is understood to have wanted to sell his share in Mount Langi Ghiran but he and Mast have been anxious to retain continuity.

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