

## Travel, food, wine and lodging in Tasmania

22 Jan 2007 by Roger Jones

*In the last of his reports from his recent tour around Australia, Roger Jones sends this report on the delights of Tasmania.*

Many people think of it as a little island off Australia, but in fact Tasmania is larger than Scotland, Denmark or Belgium, and has six airports!

The total population of Tasmania is less than 500,000 but this island 240 km south of the Australian mainland certainly has a lot going for it. Rich in both food and wine it has many claims to fame, such as no passenger rail service, the first Australian telephone call, the first Australian parking meters, and famous Tasmanians include Errol Flynn, Ricky Ponting [a cricketer – JR] and Field Marshall Montgomery. It has one of the world's richest source of abalone and Wagyu beef, and a feast of shellfish and cheeses.

The wines of Tasmania are classified as cool climate and although there are wine areas, no classification is as yet adhered to. Primarily to keep things simple the island is split into three wine growing regions, The North around Launceston, the South around Hobart and the East Coast around Bicheno.

Key players who have been making a name for the Tasmanian wine industry in the past include Clover Hill, Pipers Brook in the North, Freycinet on the East Coast and Domaine A, and Moorilla Estate in the South.

However in recent years there has been an abundance of investment on this island and the likes of **Tamar Ridge** under the guidance of Dr Andrew Pirie are now dominating the major export market. Tamar Ridge based in the North, have recently invested in some major new vineyards off the East Coast and this project is reported to be one of Tasmania's most ambitious projects to date with major wine tourism a key to its plans.

One of the major productions from Tasmania is sparkling wine, some labelled under Tasmanian labels (**Radenti, Stefano Lubiana, Clover Hill, Jansz**) and some exported to Australia for bottling under top brands such as **Yalumba** and **Hardy's**.

However what impressed me were the numerous small wineries producing high quality wine. Many of these are run as a side line to their main business, and these guys are starting to get together to export these wines to both the US and UK.

Brian Franklin, a semi retired abalone diver, bought the **Apsley Gorge** vineyard from Andrew Hood in 1998 and set up a winery in his old Fish Factory at The Gulch in Bicheno (East Coast). Here he not only has his wine making operation but a cellar door serving Tassie lobsters and oysters fresh from the water's edge. Brian spends time every autumn in France working the vintage with **Jean-Marie Fourier** and **Phillipe Charlopin**.

Brian is dedicated to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and he was delighted to get a listing at The Dorchester last year where his wine is served by the glass. Even more impressive is the short documentary film he made with Tetsuya Wakuda (of the famous Tetsuya's restaurant in Sydney) on the great food produce of Tasmania, currently being shown on Qantas. Tets' sources his ocean trout, abalone and Kobe beef from Tasmania.

One of my favourite wines from Brian was the magnum of 2000 Apsley Gorge Pinot, which was perfectly integrated, clean and had deep flavoured fruit and great texture. Just down the road we come across **Freycinet**, set up by Geoff and Susie Bull in 1980, and now run by their daughter Lindy and partner Claudio Radenti. The star of the show here is the 1998 Radenti sparkling wine, much acclaimed by Halliday, very much in the multi vintage champagne style.

Further afield we came upon **Yaxley Wines**, run by Bill Yaxley. His Pinot Gris must rate as one of the best that I have tasted. Then to **Breamcreek**, known for the quality of its Pinot Noir owned and run by Fred Peacock. Recent Rieslings have also been exceptional. **Milton Vineyard**, with wines made by contract winemaker Julian Alcorso, has an elegant sparkling Milton 2000, high quality toasty and ripe 2006 Riesling and a very elegant 2005 Pinot Noir.

Moving down towards Hobart some of the key names are **Hood Wines** (run by Andrew Hood), and **Frogmore Creek** whose sparkling Frogmore Creek Cuvee Evermore 2003 from 100% Pinot grapes had a slight blush colour but an amazing deep rich flavour, other stars from this organic winery include an '05 Riesling with hints of toast, fizz and great acidity, an '05 Pinot with dark fruit and a lovely deep, seductive, slightly sweet finish. **Stefano Lubiana**, known for his stylish sparkling, also excels with his Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling. Finally **Moorilla Estate**, with winemaker Alan Ferry, produces exceptional Pinots (especially with age) and Rieslings. There are some 20 other wineries based in the South, under the districts of Coal River Valley, Huon Valley, Derwent Valley, Tasman Trail and East Coast.

Up in the North, without question **Tamar Ridge** are now leading the way and recent introduction of Tom Ravech as senior winemaker will develop things further. What I was most impressed by was the quality these Tamar Ridge wines have with a few years of age, many of these star wines have previously been mentioned on this site, and include the Tamar Ridge Botrytis Riesling, Tamar Ridge Batman Reserve Pinot Noir etc. Further plantings on the East Coast and new machinery will increase the quality and quantity even further.

Andrew Pirie, not only in charge of Tamar Ridge but also **Rosevears Estate** and **Andrew Pirie**, was previously at Pipers Brook and is certainly one of the main guys pushing the Tasmanian wine industry forward. **Bay of Fires** and **Pipers Brook** offer high quality from the big players in the North, but there are some 25 small wineries based around the Tamar Valley, many offering good quality wines.

Eating out in Tasmania was a joy, with some of the finest food that we had in Australia. Highlights included in Launceston **Fee & Me**, exceptional quality and really well balanced innovative ideas, **Luck's** with some stunning Wagyu (Kobe) Beef and a very good wine list, and **Stillwater Restaurant** with its great views across the river, outstanding wine list and exciting food.

We stayed in various cottages by the sea on the East Coast, with spectacular views and walks. Peaceful and of exceptional quality was **Wagner's Cottages**, [www.wagnerscottages.com](http://www.wagnerscottages.com). Up in Launceston we stayed at Quest serviced apartments, first class luxury accommodation in the centre of town. **Rosevears** also have luxury chalets overlooking the Tamar.

Finally, getting to Tassie is very simple and quick from Melbourne airport (45 minutes), and with Jet Star around £40 return if you pre book. [I can confirm that nowadays it is very cheap and easy to fly around Australia - very different from the old days of a monopoly - JR] For those of you living in the UK and going to the [Australia Day wine tastings](#), The Tasmanian Department of Economic Development have their own stand at the show and Mandy Burbury will be delighted to welcome you to an array of Tasmanian's finest wines there.