

WINESTATE

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND WINE BUYING GUIDE

SPECIAL EDITION 2007

WINE OF THE YEAR

**SURVIVAL OF
THE HUNTER**

NEW RELEASES
545 tasted

50-PAGE

special feature

the best wines, winemakers
& wine companies of the year

Special Edition 2007
Vol 30 Issue 7
\$9.95 AUS (inc GST)
UK **£3.95** NZ **\$10.95**

WINESTATE
MAGAZINE
WINESTATE TROPHY
WINE OF THE YEAR
2007
Penna Late Wines Clare Valley Riesling 2004

ISSN 977-0-15-664900-2



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HUNTER VALLEY • RIESLING • QUEENSLAND • SAUVIGNON BLANC

hunter valley

NEW HOTEL MAKES BIG IMPACT

THE HUNTER'S newest hotel, Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley, is now in full stride with the opening of a new restaurant, Star Anise, and the Tea Tree spa. The hotel was recently named best new hotel in Australia and Australia's best hotel under 4.5 stars.

Star Anise features a taste of three Asian cuisines, with diners able to choose from, and mix and match, authentic Chinese,



Indian and Thai dishes. There is also a range of eastern-inspired cocktails. Dishes include whole fried baby snapper with basil, garlic, wok-tossed vegetables, chilli sauce and lime dressing, and a duck trio featuring duck pancakes, duck spring rolls and a duck and black fungus salad.

Surrounded by vineyards and a golf course, the Crowne Plaza Hunter Valley is now a very slick place to stay. Phone 138 388; <www.crowneplaza.com/huntervalley>.

FRESH TAKE ON AN OLD CONVENT

PEPPERS Convent has been a popular Hunter escape for 15 years now - and it has lost none of its charm. Recently refurbished, the Convent is still one of the very best hostelieries in the region - a gracious and elegant retreat.

The former Brigidine convent, moved lock, stock and barrel from Coonamble, has spacious and well-equipped rooms, most with wrap-around verandas. Rooms boast flat-screen TVs, internet access and music systems and breakfast is simply glorious: a huge range of fresh fruits, compotes, cereals and pikelets, followed by a choice of dishes such as eggs Benedict with smoked salmon, baby spinach and hollandaise sauce on toasted muffins, or maybe lamb's fry en croute with onion jam, bacon and gravy.

On-site facilities include a swimming pool, heated spa pavilion, tennis court, boules and the complimentary use of bicycles. There's even a small wedding chapel.

Peppers Convent is on Halls Rd, Pokolbin. Rooms start from \$396, including drinks, canapes and breakfast for two. A range of packages is available and look out for internet specials. Phone (02) 4993 8999; <www.peppers.com.au>.

ROCK BUILDS A SOLID REPUTATION

ROCK restaurant at the Poole's Rock winery has been a huge success since opening early this year, with *Sydney Morning Herald* restaurant critic Simon Thomsen saying the new venue "sets the benchmark for the Hunter Valley". Rock was also named best new restaurant in the Hunter at the NSW Restaurant and Catering Awards.

The chic, modern venue is actually two restaurants in one: Rock for dinners Thursday-Saturday and Firestick Cafe, serving casual food and wood-fired pizzas, seven days a week from 9.30am-5pm.

Chef Andrew Clarke says he is a passionate advocate of fresh, seasonal and regional ingredients - and the menu changes regularly. Andrew, whose uncle David Clarke owns Poole's Rock, has previously worked at Mesclun Brasserie, The Edge, Claude's and Bathers' Pavilion and his food is inspired by classic French techniques.

Inventive dishes on the Rock dinner menu (all served in three different portion sizes) include the likes of prawn and salmon quenelles with celeriac remoulade and shellfish sauce; scallop tortellini with Swiss brown mushrooms, crisp pancetta and riesling cream, and duck breast stuffed with apple, raisin and hazelnut on buttered zucchini and licorice sauce.

David had for several years dreamt about running a world-class restaurant overlooking the original block of 90-year-old shiraz vines



TOP CHEF CHANGES TERRITORY

DARREN Ho, who built a huge reputation at Terroir, has taken up a new position as executive chef and restaurant manager at Peterson House - just across the road from his old Hungerford Hill haunt. Multiple award winner Darren says there will be major extensions and renovations at the sparkling wine specialist over the next 12 months, and he has revamped the menu.

Restaurant Cuvee, as the new venture is

Emerson Rodriguez, meanwhile, has taken over as head chef at Chez Pok following the departure of Jamie Hartcher.

LEISURE IN THE LAP OF LUXURY

WINE lovers who also enjoy a round of golf will have fun at the Grand Mercure Apartments, part of The Vintage estate, an exclusive \$450 million integrated residential, golf, leisure and conference development at Rothbury. The modern, all-inclusive apartments have

at the estate, where he could showcase his Poole's Rock, Cockfighter's Ghost and Firestick ranges. Rock is on DeBeyers Rd, Pokolbin. Phone (02) 4998 6968; <www.rockrestaurant.com.au>.

TASTY NEWCOMER

ONE of the hottest new spots in the Hunter is the very stylish, Italianate-themed Margan tasting room and restaurant at Broke, off the beaten track but extremely scenic, with views of the vines and olive trees stretching to the stark Brokenback Ranges. The lunch menu is superb, with tasting plates (\$18 each) featuring seasonal, often local, produce. We gorged ourselves on a rich pate and terrine platter; seared scallops on pumpkin and spinach risotto with crisp pancetta and grilled sardines on shaved fennel and rocket salad.

The dinner menu, with two courses for \$49 and three for \$58, is more serious, with main courses like oven-roasted pork fillet on parmesan potatoes, witlof and grilled apples, or confit of duck served on wild mushroom risotto.

There are two wine menus, both offering choices by the glass. One consists of Margan wines (including many older vintages); the other lists some of Andrew Margan's personal favourites. The Margan restaurant and cellar door is at 1238 Millbrodale Rd, Broke. It's open for lunch and dinner on Fridays and Saturdays and breakfast and lunch on Sundays. Phone (02) 6579 1102; <www.margan.com.au>.



known, will be doing breakfast, a la carte lunches and bar bites seven days a week and degustation dinners Thursday to Sunday nights. Dinners will start from \$65 a person for seven courses - and up to 12 courses will be offered. All will have wine suggestions matched to them. "The menu is the same style as Terroir at the moment - Asian fusion without the confusion," says Darren, "but the team in the kitchen is getting the creative juices flowing and some new stuff will be evolving soon." He also plans to include a larger range of half bottles on his wine list. Phone (02) 4998 7881.

Restaurant Cuvee's emergence is the latest in a number of changes on the Hunter culinary scene, with Robert Molines having departed his eponymous restaurant at Pepper Tree to take a role behind the stoves at the new French restaurant, Bistro Beltree, on Hermitage Rd, Pokolbin. Bistro Beltree is open Thursday to Monday for lunch and Friday and Saturday nights for dinner. Phone (02) 6574 7216.

been designed to complement the natural environment and prestigious location, with facilities including flat-screen TVs, fireplaces, barbecues on outdoor terraces, and luxury amenities. Kangaroos are frequent visitors to the lawns.

Guests have access to a world-class 18-hole golf course designed by Greg Norman (ranked by Golf Australia as the highest-ranked public-access course in NSW), a leisure complex complete with clubhouse, health and fitness centre, floodlit tennis courts, a heated swimming pool and spa, and award-winning restaurant. It's just two-iron distance to a range of wineries, restaurants and cellar doors. Phone (02) 4998 2222 or email <h5740@grandmercurethevintage.com.au>.

Left: Grand Mercure apartments.
Right: Margan tasting room and restaurant.

Opposite page.
Left & centre: Rock restaurant at Poole's Rock winery.
Right: Peppers convent.