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WARMING TO TASMANIA

Scientists, industry experts and wine lovers are unanimous, with the advent of global warming, Tasmania is set to become one of the premier wine-producing regions in the world.

BY WINSOR DOBBIN

For over 30 years Dr Andrew Pirie has believed Tasmania has the potential to be one of the world's truly great wine regions. Critics scoffed that Tasmania was too cold, too remote, too slow.

But with the advent of global warming, and as wine drinkers' tastes switch from big, oaky high-alcohol styles to more restrained cool-climate wines, it is increasingly looking as if Pirie was right all along.

Most of Australia's leading sparkling wines, including the Bay of Fires Arras that sells for up to \$60 a bottle, have Tasmanian chardonnay and pinot noir as major components.

Leading wines writers are increasingly identifying Tasmanian pinots as being among the best in Australia, silky and sensuous on the palate with lovely fruit and earthiness, while the second Climate Change & Wine conference in Barcelona, Spain, in February, heard that "narrow coastal regions where cool ocean breezes provide relief from rising temperatures, including Tasmania, will be premier wine areas".

All of which must have brought a smile to the face of Pirie, who gained Australia's first PhD in

viticulture and founded the pioneering Pipers Brook winery in 1973. Today he makes wines for myriad labels, including Tamar Ridge and his own Pirie Estate and Pirie South.

He's now based in the Tamar Valley; a region he says is perfect for producing "fresh, elegant wines that match contemporary food styles".

Scientists have warned that if global warming trends continue some of the warmer climate regions around the world, several in Australia, will not be viable for producing table wines.

With its cooler temperatures and maritime influence, Tasmania is less likely to be affected.

There are four key wine-making regions of Tasmania, the north, the south, the east coast and the north-west, along with several sub-regions.

The Tamar Valley, centred around Launceston, also includes vineyards at Relbia, just down the road from Launceston Airport, while to the north-east of the Tamar, and considerably cooler, is the Pipers River region that produces the fruit for sparkling wines including Arras, Kreglinger and Jansz, as well as aromatic whites that shine for labels like Pipers Brook and Dalrymple.



Tasmania is awash with wineries

"The fruit we get here is perfect for producing the very highest quality sparkling wines," says Pipers Brook and Ninth Island winemaker Rene Bezemer.

Ed Carr, chief sparkling winemaker for Hardy's and the man who oversees Arras, is equally positive.

"In a few years' time we will be right up there with French Champagnes," Carr says. "For good sparkling wines the vines need to be older and the grapes' characters needs time to develop. We are getting to that stage now."

The Tamar Valley is often compared to Burgundy's Cote d'Or with both regions sharing a cool, humid climate – and the Tasmanian wine industry delights in pointing out climatic characteristics the island shares with great wine regions of Europe.

Growing grapes in Tassie is not new. The first vineyard was planted in New Town, a Hobart suburb, in 1823, but it is only in the last 30 years that producers including Moorilla Estate,

Domaine A/Stoney Vineyard,

Meadowbank, Freycinet Vineyard and others have begun to make an impact on the global stage.

There are wineries in the Coal, Derwent and Huon Valleys surrounding Hobart – and visitors to Hobart can try many of them at Grape, an excellent wine bar on Salamanca Place.

There are only a handful of east coast wineries, with Aspley Gorge and Freycinet Vineyard the standouts, while the wineries of the emerging north-west, on the road to Cradle

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Mountain, include Barringwood Park and Lake Barrington Vineyard.

In total there are over 250 vineyards, 28 wineries and 67 cellar doors dotted around the Apple isle. The vast majority remain boutique operations, although Constellation Wines, Yalumba and Foster's all buy Tasmanian fruit to add elegance to blends.

British-based Jancis Robinson, one of the world's leading wine writers, is a huge fan of Tasmania's wines and predicts a bright future.

She writes: "Tasmania may be treated as an anachronistic joke by some Australians but not, I would wager, by Australian wine lovers. The wines reflect the pristine atmosphere of the

island state and Australia's coolest climate with crisp, fresh acidity and well defined fruit flavours."

While wine-producing vineyards in New South Wales and South Australia reported the 2008 vintage as being "the vintage from hell", most Tasmanian vigneronns were delighted.

"It is a vintage that will keep both the band manager (for quantity) and the consumer (for quality) happy," says Gerald Ellis, proprietor of Meadowbank, a winery at Richmond, outside Hobart.

Ellis, though, sees the effects of global warming creeping up, saying: "For the past two years vintage has finished by Mothers' Day, and that's earlier than ever before." ■

LABELS TO TRY

- **Tamar Valley:** Josef Chromy, Tamar Ridge, Velo Estate, Holm Oak, Goat Hill, Moores Hill, Pirie, Stoney Rise
- **Pipers River:** Pipers Brook, Jansz, Brook Eden, Bay of Fires
- **Hobart and surrounds:** Hood Wines/Wellington, Meadowbank Estate, Puddleduck, Domaine A, Stefano Lubiana, Moorilla Estate, Home Hill
- **East coast:** Apsley Gorge, Freycinet Vineyard, Spring Vale

