



WORDS WINSOR DOBBIN | PHOTOGRAPHY TOM LAU

LEXUS LIFTS THE LID ON SIX AUSTRALIAN WINERIES ON THE VERGE OF GREATNESS.

THE LIST

TO BE CERTAIN OF BUYING THE BEST vintages from cult wine producers like Clare Valley icon Wendouree and Margaret River standout Moss Wood you need to either be on their mailing list or be extremely well connected.

Unfortunately, many of Australia's top boutique producers have waiting lists to get on their mailing lists; and wines like Penfolds Grange and Henschke Hill of Grace are often available only on allocation – particularly in very good years. When a winery gets a cult following, or is discovered by leading international wine critics, its best wines can be almost impossible to lay your hands on.

A key to drinking well – and affordably – is to identify the best new labels before they become fashionable.

Australia has some of the most innovative and exciting wine producers in the world – and new grape varieties are expanding horizons for both drinkers and wine producers alike.

There are no certainties when it comes to wine. Several 'next best things' have disappeared into obscurity, however there's a very good chance one of the six little-known wineries featured here could be the next Wild Duck Creek Duck Muck Shiraz, Bass Phillip Pinot Noir or Giaconda Chardonnay. ➤



**BALLABOURNEEN**

Daniel Binet, formerly the award-winning winemaker at Hunter Valley winery Capercaillie, recently set up his own wine business, Ballabourneen, with the backing of former hobby vigneron, Alex Stuart; who owned the label but had not made any wine for a couple of years. Binet, 29, admits the timing is bad for starting his own venture, but is prepared to back his ability. "You've got to put it all on the line," he says. Born in Vanuatu of French parents, Binet grew up in Australia and was employed by Capercaillie in 2003. By 2005 he was a finalist in the Wine Society young winemaker of the year competition and is regarded as one of the best young winemakers around. Binet has access to fruit from the late Len Evans' former vineyards. At the moment, he is using the Tatler winery to process his fruit. He aims to eventually produce around 6,000 cases a year of mainly shiraz, semillon, chardonnay and chambourcin, along with a tempranillo, rosé and moscato. Wines from the 2009 vintage are out now with Binet predicting "the semillon should be something special". Ballabourneen's 2003 The Stuart Chardonnay (\$28) - made by Binet on a contract basis - has lovely texture and complexity and is still amazingly youthful. [www.ballabourneenwines.com.au](http://www.ballabourneenwines.com.au)



**TAPANAPPA**

Former Petaluma vigneron Brian Croser has been one of Australia's most influential winemakers for almost four decades - and he isn't slowing down. Croser has partnered with the family that owns Bollinger Champagnes and the Cazes family of Bordeaux (Chateau Lynch-Bages) to produce site-specific wines of the very highest quality under the Tapanappa label. Croser is committed to the research and development of new 'distinguished sites' - using the best possible vineyards for each specific grape variety. Tapanappa's chardonnay comes from Croser's own family block 'The Tiers' in the Adelaide Hills, while a cabernet blend is from the Whalebone Vineyard at Wrattobully on the Limestone Coast, and the latest addition, a pinot noir, from a cool, foggy vineyard at Parawa on the Fleurieu Peninsula. "You can't stand still," says Croser, who says it is his "lifelong mission to nurture the most expressive and unique terroirs of Australia". "To make the best wine possible, you must choose the [grape] variety to match the climate and then employ the appropriate viticultural practice to allow the best expression of the site." The intense but elegant 2005 Whalebone Vineyard Cabernet Shiraz and the complex but appealing 2007 The Tiers Chardonnay retail for around \$75, while the 2007 Foggy Vineyard Pinot Noir, unfiltered and very varietal, sells for \$50. [www.tapanappawines.com.au](http://www.tapanappawines.com.au)

**PARADIGM HILL**

One of the rising stars of the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, Paradigm Hill is the vision of passionate former medical researcher and biotech expert, Dr George Mihaly and his wife Ruth, a former chef and now a viticulturist. George has something of the mad professor about him - he's constantly working on winery experiments - but his wines all ooze drinkability. He admits an "obsession with the pursuit of quality". There are only five wines in the range, all made from estate-grown fruit, which are to be found mainly on three-hat restaurant wine lists and in boutique wine stores. The pinot gris regularly sells out on the first weekend of release but you'll find the 2006 L'Ami Sage Pinot Noir (\$42) and 2006 Col's Block Shiraz (\$35) rather easier to track down. [www.paradigmhill.com.au](http://www.paradigmhill.com.au)

**WINES TO WATCH**

There are several other small wineries making outstanding wines that remain known only to aficionados. Among those worth looking out for are the tiny Apsley Gorge winery on Tasmania's East Coast for chardonnay and pinot noir, Tilbrook in the Adelaide Hills, Patina in Orange, Chalkers Crossing in the Hilltops near Young, Cape Grace in Margaret River, Collector Wines from Lake George outside Canberra, Glandore from the Hunter Valley, Savaterre from Beechworth and new Barossa Valley powerhouses Murray Street and Glaetzer/Heartland.

**THE STORY**

I first met Rory Lane when he was the marketing manager for the reliably good Heathcote/Yarra Valley producer Shelmerdine - but Lane had a secret, he was making his own wines in his spare time in a Melbourne hobby shed. Lane, 30, who says, "wine is my passion", is good at keeping secrets. While he seems like just another knockabout bloke, it turns out that he has a degree in ancient Greek literature. He recently gave up his job as technical director for a winemaking equipment company to devote himself full-time to winemaking. "It was a big step - but a necessary step," he says, "I make the wine and I have to sell it. It's time to get out and wear out some shoe leather." Lane aims to expand from 770 cases to 1,300 cases from the 2009 vintage and plans to make shiraz and pinot noir from cool-climate Henty, in addition to his Grampians shirazes from the Victorian high country, of which there will be three from the 2008 vintage. Lane says: "The Story makes Grampians Shiraz and little parcels of other novelties when we feel the conditions are right." Lane started The Story in 2004, after a couple of vintages making wine in Oregon, with the aim "of making a reasonable drop of something I liked to drink, and that my mates would no doubt assist me with". He's since attracted rave reviews from James Halliday and a five-star rating in Halliday's 2009 *Australian Wine Companion*. Lane loves Grampians shiraz "for its distinctive pepperiness, medium body and ability to age gracefully". The Story wines are produced in tiny quantities; The Story 2007 Grampians Shiraz (\$22) combines real character with drinkability, while only 74 cases were made of the superbly balanced and characterful The Story 2006 Westgate Vineyard Grampians Shiraz (\$38), which will probably be sold out before you read this. [www.thestory.com.au](http://www.thestory.com.au)

**TAR & ROSES**

Tar & Roses is the exciting new venture of veteran former Mitchelton chief winemaker, Don Lewis, and his business partner, Narelle King, an accountant turned winemaker.

The pair split their time between making wine in Spain and in Victoria – using fruit from Heathcote and the Strathbogrie Ranges – and the results are impressive.

Lewis and King have spent three vintages making wine in Priorat, in Spain, and specialise in Spanish and Italian varieties.

They believe the Heathcote area of Victoria is where savoury Spanish red tempranillo will flourish.

“The area lends itself to the classic chalky tannin structure typical of the variety,” says Lewis, who says he adores “the tannins, structure and distinct expressiveness of Spanish wines”.

Recent star release include the Tar & Roses 2008 Pinot Grigio (\$18), the 2007 Tempranillo (\$26) and the 2006 Miro blend from Spain, mainly carinena and garnacha, which retails for \$48.

[www.tarandroses.com.au](http://www.tarandroses.com.au)



**TSCHARKE**

Damien Tscharke, a sixth-generation Barossa Valley vigneron, dares to be different.

Unlike most of his Barossa brethren, who concentrate on intensely-flavoured shirazes, Tscharke grows Mediterranean varieties like albarino, zinfandel (primitivo), tempranillo and montepulciano, which he says are “full of flavour, style and regional character, but perfect for warm summers and alfresco dining”.

There is no doubt global warming will see an increasing number of wines made from more heat-resistant grape varieties – and Tscharke, who started his own label in 2004, is ahead of the game.

He planted albarino, tempranillo, graciano, montepulciano and zinfandel in vineyards between 1999 and 2002 and has spent a decade “researching alternative varietals which are suited to the region and its climatic challenges”.

Tscharke made the first albarino in Australia and his version of the aromatic Spanish white, the Tscharke 2008 Girl Talk Albarino (\$21) is opulent, refreshing and a great match for seafood.

The other standout is the Tscharke 2006 Only Son Tempranillo Graciano (\$30), a blend of Spanish varieties that is soft, savoury and delightfully drinkable.

He uses open fermenters and a basket press to handcraft his estate-grown wines –and the parcels are small; with only 80 cases made of the 2007 The Curse Zinfandel.

Tscharke has already attracted attention from US guru Robert Parker’s *Wine Advocate*.

[www.tscharke.com.au](http://www.tscharke.com.au)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Australian wine expert and well-respected writer **Winsor Dobbin** is a regular visitor to vineyards throughout Australia and the rest of the world. A wine-list consultant to one of Australia’s leading hotel groups, Dobbin writes about wine for *The Sun-Herald* and a wide range of magazines and websites, and is a regular columnist for wine industry publication *Winestate* and for [www.visitvineyards.com](http://www.visitvineyards.com). His work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Guardian*. His weekly wine tips are available on his website: [www.winsordobbin.com.au](http://www.winsordobbin.com.au).



Winsor Dobbin at the Ultimo Wine Centre in Sydney. Boutique bottle shops like Ultimo can often source hard-to-find wines.