

# small & BEAUTIFUL

Pinot might be something of a niche in Australia's red wine portfolio, but it's a growing one, and it already has a passionate coterie of admirers. **Chris Losh** watches on as a room full of European sommeliers get ready to feel the lurve...

**T**hink 'red grapes' for Australia and 99 per cent of sommeliers are going to reply with Shiraz or Cabernet Sauvignon. And to be sure Pinot Noir isn't planted in anything like the acreage of its two warm-climate peers.

Yet as the whole Australian cool-climate boom has taken root, so its popularity has grown, with places like Tasmania offering Pinots that are every bit as ethereal as those from Burgundy.

For the purposes of this workshop, *Imbibe* teamed up with Wine Australia to focus on the two regions that have forged arguably the strongest reputation for their work with the grape: the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula.

Terry Threlfall of Chez Bruce walked the sommeliers through the two regions, before allowing them to get to grips with the wines themselves in a free-pour tasting, which included Pinots from across the continent.

## MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Mornington Peninsula is expensive. Close to Melbourne, it's the weekend retreat for the city's moneyed classes – a haven of beaches, golf courses and summer homes. Land prices are high, and that gets passed on to the wines – a good number of which are served in wineries' restaurants.

Australia might be seen in the popular imagination as a place full of large vineyards, but in fact, in the Mornington Peninsula, the wine estates tend to be small – perhaps because the price of

vineyards is so high. The predominant grapes are Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

The peninsula is (as you would expect) surrounded on three sides by water: the Bass Strait, Port Philip Bay and Western Port, making it very definitely a maritime climate: warm, humid and with plenty of rain, mainly in winter. Their predominant soil types are sand, volcanic and clay, though many of the differences in the wines are down to winemaking philosophy as much as they are to the land.

First planted as long ago as 1860, producing some award-winning wines in the 1880s, it fell away (as did most Australian wine regions) at the start of the 20th century, before undergoing a real resurgence in the 1970s.

'Pinot Noir is up and coming here,' said Threlfall. 'It's not so well known as it is in the Yarra, but it's definitely on the way up.'

Our sommeliers were impressed with the standard of the wines that they found here, with Jules Watson only half-joking when he suggested that the first wine (the Ten Minutes by Tractor) was actually a 'ringer' from Burgundy.

'There is a certain delicacy that does hint at Burgundy,' agreed Threlfall. 'They are not like Central Otago which has lots of ripe fruit on the mid-palate.'

Andaz's Joris Beijin, meanwhile, was much taken with the Kooyong Haven. 'There's a real tautness to it – a definite minerality,' he said. Parker, apparently, doesn't rate this wine – something which has absolutely delighted the owner.

As in Burgundy, though, such minerality comes at a price. While the sommeliers really liked the wines below, and their elegance and food-friendliness in particular, they might take a bit of hand-selling to the public.

## TASTED

- **Ten Minutes by Tractor McCutcheon Vineyard Pinot Noir 2006**, Mornington Peninsula, £24.25, H&H Bancroft
- **Kooyong Haven Pinot Noir 2005**, Mornington Peninsula, £24.65, Great Western Wines
- **William Downie Pinot Noir 2008**, Gippsland, £24.23, Liberty



## YARRA VALLEY

One hour east of Melbourne, the Yarra Valley butts up against the edge of the city and is a popular destination for tourists and day-trippers as well as with viticulturalists.

It has a cool continental climate, though breezes off the sea mean that there is some ocean influence. It's far more hilly than Mornington Peninsula, with altitude varying from 50–470m. In fact, altitude and aspect are the key, with the region able to produce everything from base wines for sparkling wine to Shiraz.

Soils are a combination of sandy loam in the north and red volcanic. Quite undulating and green, fertility can be an issue, and though Pinot Noir is well established it is far from being ubiquitous. Between them, Mornington Peninsula and

Yarra Valley have less of the grape under vine than Central Otago.

That said, the region's long history certainly counts in its favour.

'There's an understanding of which vineyards produce which fruit, and you can see that in the three wines here,' said Threlfall as our sommeliers got stuck into the guided tasting. 'There are subtle differences but there are consistent elements too.'

Certainly, our tasters were impressed – not least with the value for money on offer. Robert Giorgione spoke for many when he said 'I scored these wines really highly. You can offer great wines with real consistency at a good price.'

## TASTED

- **Mac Forbes Pinot Noir 2007**, Yarra Valley, £13.27, Clark Foyster
- **Coldstream Hills Pinot Noir 2007**, Yarra Valley, POA, Fosters EMEA
- **Giant Steps Sexton Vineyard Pinot Noir 2006**, Yarra Valley, £11.50, OW Loeb

## Sommelier comments

'I really liked the Yarra Valley Pinots. They were really perfumed and complex, and the prices compared to Burgundy were amazing.'

**Olivier Marie, Coq d'Argent**



'The Pinot Noir tasting was fascinating. You could get your head round the different regional styles, but also appreciate the differences from producer to producer.'

**Sue Jones, the Harrow at Little Bedwyn**

'As a profession, we need to get over Burgundy being the home of Pinot Noir. These wines kick the butt of Bourgogne rouge at the same price.'

**Miriam McLachlan, Zuma**



## FREE POUR TASTING

So much for the theory, as explained by Threlfall and illustrated with the handful of carefully-chosen wines, now it was time for our sommeliers to put his words to the test. We lined up a couple of dozen Australian Pinots, flighted by region, and asked our corkscrew-jockeys to taste them blind. Their scores were then fed into the mighty *Imbibe* computer, which listed them in order of preference, along with tasting notes. To stop our tasters from fainting with exhaustion (and to test the food-friendliness of the wines) we asked them to try the wines with some food prepared by Brett Graham of The Ledbury. The food was crisp suckling pig belly with balsamic and quince, and pheasant, plum and bay leaf beignet.

### 79 Pirie Sigma Pinot Noir 2005, Tasmania

Sweet and sour notes, with depth and spice, intensity and elegance. 'This is great,' swooned Jim Carey. 'The best wine on the table.' 'Deep, concentrated, spicy and very balanced. Complex and elegant,' said Luigi Buonanno. **£16.63, Stratford's**

### 77 Tamar Ridge Estates Kayena Vineyard Pinot Noir 2006, Tasmania

Nothing shy about this wine, which mixed blackberries, bilberries and leaf mulch with gay abandon. 'Huge depth – would work with game or steak,' said Sue Jones. 'Deep and long, with lovely concentration!' agreed Jules Watson. **£8.48, ABS**

### 77 Ten Minutes by Tractor 10X Pinot Noir 2008, Mornington Peninsula

Rich and concentrated, with nice juicy fruit and aromas of chocolate, but no small amount of elegance. 'Quite serious and restrained, made up of a lot of little flavours,' observed Joris Beijin, while Nicholas Angelina praised its 'good texture and nice finish'. 'Complex, with beautiful acidity – chiselled and refreshing,' said Olivier Marie. **£14.68, H&H Bancroft**

### BEST FOOD WINES

#### 77 Ten Minutes by Tractor 10X Pinot Noir 2008, Mornington Peninsula

With its elegance and structure, 'Ten Minutes' was the overwhelming favourite as a food match from the thirteen wines on offer, reckoned to be a top match with both of the dishes offered and a broad selection of restaurant classics as well. **£14.68, H&H Bancroft**

### BEST VALUE WINE

#### 77 Tamar Ridge Estates Kayena Vineyard Pinot Noir 2006, Tasmania

In a flight of wines where, if the scores are anything to go by, there weren't any duffers at all, a second place finish combined with a price of less than a tenner (ex VAT) marks the Tamar Ridge out as a truly strong performer. It's muscular style makes it an interesting contrast to the Ten Minutes by Tractor, too.

### 77 Yabby Lake Vineyard Pinot Noir 2007, Mornington Peninsula

Big and bold, this has an exotic mix of plummy fruit, violets, spice and eucalyptus on the nose, it worked very well with the herbal elements in the pheasant. 'Spicy cherry/raspberry compote – earthy and savoury,' said Emily Pearl Campbell. 'Well balanced and powerful,' added Miriam McLachlan. **£13.50, Swig**

### 76 De Bortoli Estate Pinot Noir 2006, Yarra Valley

A good rich, slightly rustic nose, with plenty of juicy fruit following through on a palate that is surprisingly fresh. 'Lovely depth here,' said Katie Exton. 'Earth and spice with a plummy finish.' **£10.70, De Bortoli**

### 75 Pirie Estate Pinot Noir 2007, Tasmania

Good balance and weight to this wine, which mixed cherries with blackcurrants and nuts. 'Good developed nose, rich and elegant. This was one of the few wines that could stand up to the charring on the pork belly,' said Miguel Leal. **£11.46, Stratford's**

### 75 Stonier Pinot Noir 2007, Mornington Peninsula

After an initial hit of vanilla and red sherbet, there's a tight, leafy freshness here that gives this wine a more European slant. 'Good purity and restraint,' said Katie Exton. 'There's an elegance to this.' **£11.06, Bibendum**

### 75 Innocent Bystander Pinot Noir 2008, Yarra Valley

Smoky and toasty, with spicy autumnal fruit and a restrained palate. Fresh, but also soft. 'Farmyardy, but clean and balanced, this would be great with pheasant,' enthused Matej Lacko. 'I like that freshness,' added Olivier Marie. **£7.28, Liberty**

### 74 Red Claw Pinot Noir 2008, Mornington Peninsula

Good fruit purity, with damson flavours backed up with an attractive earthy, truffy character and a well-balanced mouthfeel. 'Elegant, with nice soft tannins,' praised Miguel Leal. 'Perfect with fatty pork,' added Sue Jones. **£9.80, Swig**

## PROMOTIONS

The following agents are currently offering promotions to *Imbibe* readers who order any of the Pinots mentioned in this article

### ABS

Contact: Lesley Gray  
lg@abswineagencies.co.uk  
01372 274 065

### ENOTRIA

Contact: Lyn McKnight  
l.mcknight@enotria.co.uk  
020 8961 4411

### H&H BANCROFT

Contact: Robert Allen  
rallen@bancroftwines.com  
07703 316 410

### SWIG

Contact: Robin  
robin@swig.co.uk  
020 8995 7060



### 73 Yering Station Pinot Noir 2005, Yarra Valley

Refined fruit character on the nose, with plenty of sour-cherry Pinot style. Quite developed. 'Well-balanced and earthy. Classic Yarra,' said Miriam McLachlan. 'Cardamom and liquorice – there's lots of elegance and finesse here,' added Olivier Gasselien. **£8.83, Enotria**

### 71 Punt Road Pinot Noir 2006, Yarra Valley

Vanilla, musky, leathery spice and red fruits mixed up in a delicately-flavoured package. A polished, well-integrated example. 'Wonderful classic Pinot,' said James Hopkins. 'Quite Burgundian,' added Katie Exton. **£8.83, PLB**

### 71 Notley Gorge Pinot Noir 2007, Tasmania

It might look old in the glass, but in fact its character is all crushed, juicy fruits. 'Deep and farm-yardy – ah I love Pinot,' sighed Joris Beijin. 'Good, approachable food wine,' added Matt Ward. **£9.31, Enotria**

### 66 Devil's Corner Pinot Noir 2008, Tasmania

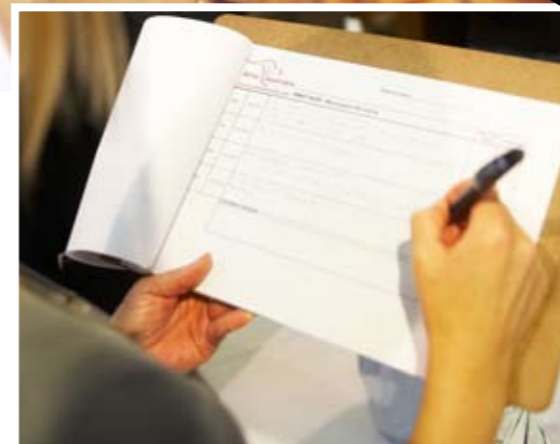
Fresh and lighter in style, this wine was something of a panel splitter, though most agreed that it was good value for money. 'Harmonious,' said Matej Lacko. 'Very quaffable,' added James Hopkins. **£6.08, ABS**



### FOOD AND WINE MATCHING TIPS

#### The Ledbury chef Brett Graham

'Two elements of Australian Pinot Noir make it perfect for pig belly. The forward, sweet fruit appeals to pork in the same way that traditional apple sauce does, while the dry, firm acidity cuts cleanly through the fat of the belly. More savoury Pinot Noir will match to gamey pheasant. The plum and fragrant bay leaf to garnish the pheasant complement the bright, ripe fruit aromatics.'



## Sommelier comments

'The Yarra Valley Pinots were extremely good value for money. Those wine makers and vineyards have been established for many years; they've made their mistakes and learned from them. The wines showed elegance, balance and consistency. For me, they were quintessential Aussie Pinots.'

**Robert Giorgione, consultant**



'People would consider Australian Pinot Noir to be bigger and fatter than a New Zealand example. But actually I often found myself talking more about Cotes de Beaune than Central Otago. Yarra especially could be a place to take Burgundy lovers who might want something different.'

**Katie Exton, Chez Bruce**

'The wines here today showed me that Australian Pinot Noirs really can stand up and be counted. They compare really well not just with other New World regions, but with Burgundy as well.'

**Jim Carey, consultant**



'There were only a couple of Pinots that I didn't like in the free-pour, which isn't bad in a flight of 13 wines. Interestingly, a lot of them were so delicate that they didn't work with the food prepared by Brett Graham.'

**Joris Beijin, Andaz**

'The juicier wines were phenomenal with the pheasant beignet. The Mornington wines, with their juicy, crunchy red-berry fruit, would be good with a whole load of fine food.'

**Simon Howland, Wine By Simon**



'I'm leaving this place with a really good impression of Australian Pinot Noir. Where else can you get such great Pinot for the money? And the consistency was impressive.'

**Miguel Leal, Casa Leal**

'The Yarra Pinots showed how good the region is for the money. For £12 they really over-deliver, and once you get up to the £15 level you can get something truly special. Burgundy will be copying Australia soon.'

**Roger Jones, the Harrow at Little Bedwyn**

