



The importance of regionality

The importance of wine regionality is an increasingly seen catchphrase in the Australian wine trade.

Many prominent industry figures are touting the need to establish stronger Australian regional identities among consumers in both local and key export markets, in order to stimulate consumer loyalty and resist downward price pressures.

At the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation there are already plans underway to promote Riesling as "the" Great Southern wine, as part of its Regional Heroes campaign. (Regional Heroes are wines and producers that have blazed a trail for their region's profile, wines that add and sustain interest for consumers by fostering a clear association between region and variety/style).



However, there are several arguments that can underpin Shiraz as the single varietal of choice to fly the Great Southern banner, and that of Frankland River in particular, and the AWBC programme could well expand to include Shiraz in future. As Ferngrove chief executive Anthony Wilkes explains, the premium Shiraz styles coming out of Frankland River, the Great Southern, and indeed, WA, possess significant points to differentiate them from the big, bold style usually associated with Australia and our current best-known Shiraz region, the Barossa Valley.

"The challenge for us is our Frankland River wine doesn't taste like 'Australian' wine because it is not that big style that the consumer is used to, especially in the US market," Anthony explains.

"It's a very good food wine, it has fantastic structural complexity but still shows finesse and elegance, and that complements food well... that's the message we need to get out. "Domestically, more and more people are starting to drill down and look at the differences in our regions, but we have to educate consumers where the Frankland region is, our pluses and advantages, and we have to concentrate on creating demand for WA Shiraz, and particularly for Frankland River Shiraz."

Anthony also points to the words of renowned viticultural expert Dr John Gladstones to bolster the Shiraz case. Discussing Frankland's climate, soils, topography, low spring frost incidence and low ripening period rainfall in a 1992 report, Dr Gladstones wrote:

"A study of the Frankland climate shows it to be very well suited to Shiraz, with a theoretical expectation that it will produce cool-climate wine styles comparable to those of the upper Rhône, but with greater reliability.

Few places so nearly match the theoretical ideal. Results so far have strongly confirmed expectations, with upper Rhône-like wines

that have been extremely successful both in Australian wine shows and in the marketplace given its adaptation and outstanding export potential, the idea of developing Shiraz as a Frankland regional specialty has much merit and a high likelihood of success."



Ferngrove Out and About

Art and wine

For the third successive year Ferngrove has been the exclusive wine sponsor for leading WA-based promoters Mellen Events. Thousands of concert-goers enjoyed Ferngrove wines while listening to shows from A-list performers visiting Perth including kd lang, Air, Cyndi Lauper and Harry Connick Jr at the superb Kings Park open air venue. In a further arts foray, Ferngrove is also the current official wine sponsor for the University of WA's Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, serving Estate and Symbols wines at all gallery opening events.

Pork pairing

This month Ferngrove is midway through a rather unusual food-wine pairing experience, featuring our four Estate series wines – the Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot and Shiraz – and several courses of "the other white meat". Australian Pork Limited is running a series of dinners around Australia promoting pork to chefs, restaurants and related trade. Host restaurants include Sydney's Pendolino and Perth's White Salt.

Variety Bash

Ferngrove proudly joins Skywest as a joint car sponsor in this year's 20th annual WA Variety Bash, on August 15-23. The Ferngrove-Skywest car, complete with giant polystyrene Symbols wine bottle atop, will feature in a major fundraiser event at the Perth Hyatt in August.

Win a case of our rich winter reds!

All those tasting notes made you thirsty? Then enter our Ferngrove Rich, Red Winter Competition and win a mixed case of all six wines – one bottle each of the 2004 The Stirlings, 2006 Majestic Cabernet Sauvignon, King Malbec and Dragon Shiraz, and two bottles of the 2007 Estate Merlot, Estate Shiraz, Symbols Shiraz-Viognier and Symbols Cabernet Merlot.

To win, simply answer the following question – name the wine variety that the Frankland River region could become justly famous for in future (hint: first read our story on the Importance of Regionality) – and email your answer, name and daytime contact details to info@ferngrove.com.au, or post to Ferngrove Rich, Red Winter Competition, PO Box 204, SOUTH PERTH WA 6951, by August 31 2008.

2008 vintage report

FERNGROVE vineyard manager Chris Zur reports consistent yields and good quality across the board for vintage 2008 at Frankland River.

"Our yields were just slightly above the long-term average which was great, quality was excellent across all varieties," Chris says. "Riesling in particular was very smart, as was the Shiraz and Chardonnay, and we had really good colour in all reds."

April's 100ml rainfall helped temper rising baumes in the later reds, with one heavy 50ml fall on April 1 lending particular support to the Cabernet Sauvignon. "We were hoping for a fall like that. The baumes had been up around 14 to 15 degrees and the Cabernet was still showing some green characters, so the rain brought it back down nicely and slowed the ripening, and the moisture in the soil profile prevented berries shrivelling."

See out the winter in rich, red style

THE saying goes that many human beings declare they enjoy the winter, but in fact, what they really enjoy is feeling proof against it... and here's all the proof any wine lover could require to sit out the chilly season in comfort, brought to a roaring fire near you from premium Frankland River winegrape country.

Tasting notes

Ferngrove 2005 The Stirlings

An intriguing bouquet of mulberry, blueberry, dark plums and blackberries shows rosemary and lifted cedar in the background. The palate exhibits intense Shiraz richness of dark fruits, balanced by mulberry Cabernet Sauvignon characters, with hints of anise, spice and blueberry.

Winemaker's comment: The Stirlings is a tiny production and the barrels really seem to select themselves, showing us the best regional expression of the varieties of each vintage: in this case 57 per cent Shiraz and 43 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon. It will benefit from up to ten years' careful cellaring.

Ferngrove 2006 Majestic Cabernet Sauvignon

With complex mulberry and blackberry aromatics on the nose among lifted highlights of cedary oak echoed on the palate, this wine illustrates decisively how careful and expert management can deliver exemplary wine even during tricky vintages weather-wise! Long, powerful, textured and fleshy, the wine opens



to reveal mouth-filling elegant dark plum and rich blackberry flavours.

Winemaker's comment: The Majestic is a fine example of Frankland River Cabernet at its best. Cellar a minimum of six years for further rewards.

Ferngrove 2006 King Malbec

Black plum, Christmas cake, spice and blackberry dominate the bouquet, while a sweet core of black fruits and spice show typical varietal character on the palate. Concentrated and fleshy, it finishes with French oak softness and fine, long tannins.

Winemaker's comment: This wine shows why Ferngrove's "King" continues to establish itself as the quintessential style of Western Australian Malbec. Enjoy the complexity and purity of this fruit-driven wine now or cellar for at least four more years.

Ferngrove 2006 Dragon Shiraz

The 2006 Dragon demonstrates a lifted bouquet of blueberry and dark plums with hints of rosemary and spice, and a dense, opulent

varietal briefs...

Shiraz: perhaps as good as we've seen... deep and vibrant, dark colours with intense flavour.

Riesling: a cracker! Retained much of its intense natural acidity, although a hotter weekend at the start of March kept some Great Southern Riesling growers nervous.

Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc blends: very pleasing, showing fresh varietal characters.

Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon: both very good.



palate, complex and layered. Blueberry and spice with a tempting lick of licorice finish with long, fine tannins, resulting in a fine wine of restrained power and intensity.

Winemaker's comment: 2006 was a cool, long vintage, giving Shiraz the opportunity to show its delicate side, yet with restrained power and intensity. Cellar four years or more.

Ferngrove 2007 Estate Merlot

From the exceptionally warm and dry 2007 vintage comes this delicious drop showing dark red plums, blackberry and mulberry on the nose, with just a hint of violet, fresh spice and vanilla. A juicy plump palate of ripe plum and berries follows, fleshy and rounded with supporting French oak, a touch of spice and fine tannin finish.

Winemaker's comment: Merlot should be juicy and fleshy with varietal characters distinctive of the region, and this vintage epitomises the Ferngrove style. Cellar with confidence for at least five years.



Ferngrove 2007 Estate Shiraz

Crushed dark mulberry and blueberry and lashings of anise, musk and pepper on the bouquet precede an intricate palate of fresh black berry fruits, rounded and textural, with supporting long, fine dusty tannin and underlying spice.

Winemaker's comment: Aged for 12 months in a mixture of one, two and three year old French oak, this Shiraz promises to be one of the red highlights of the 2007 vintage. Cellar up to eight years and allow it to flesh out and show more of its intense fruit varietals.

Ferngrove 2007 Symbols Shiraz Viognier

Comprised of 91 per cent Shiraz, 6 per cent Viognier and 3 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon, this classic, co-fermented Rhone-style blend has a lively nose of lifted musk sticks with a background of blueberry and dark plums. The fleshy palate displays intense black plums, liquorice and blackberry.



Winemaker's comment: Viognier gives this wine a distinct musk lift, while the palate retains the richness of the Shiraz. It has a suppleness that suits short term consumption, but it's also got enough punch to improve in the cellar for two to three years.

Ferngrove 2007 Symbols Cabernet Merlot

Aromatic mulberry and blackberry, hints of blackcurrant and faint bay leaf open on the nose and a mouth-coating texture of supple, flavoursome, dark plum fruits and black berries follows, supported by fine, lingering French oak tannin.

Winemaker's comment: In the tradition of this ever-popular blend, Merlot is blended to the Cabernet to provide a sweet core of blackberry and fleshy fruits on the front and mid palate, giving the wine more presence and helping to balance some of the firm Cabernet tannins. It will improve with short-term cellaring, or drink now to enjoy the pristine fruit flavours.

Inside the barrel – Ferngrove's oak philosophies

Ferngrove's senior winemaker Kim Horton gives some insight behind the oak selection and treatment for this year's red releases...

Generally speaking, we try to choose oak that will complement a particular wine's flavour and style profile. Oak can vary in a number of ways, but its grain size, seasoning, toasting and the cooper that are more important to Ferngrove. We also tend to use a variety of oak types within varieties to suit particular blocks, as well as adding a wide range of blending options.

Grain size is relative to a tree's annual growth. If growth is low, then the grain is much tighter. Size is important because tighter and finer grain has far more aromatic potential than wider grain. Fine grain also permits slower maturation and less extraction of oak phenols, and suits wine that has a firm tannin structure and strong intensity of fruit, such as our Majestic Cabernet. We also use the wider grain to build mid-palate sweetness into wine and to add more tannin length, especially in wines that are already very aromatic – for example our Malbec and Shiraz.

Oak sourced for the Orchid series is **seasoned** for either two or three years. Seasoning uses the effects of rain and air to leach out unwanted green characters and increase favourable aroma compounds.

During barrel construction, heating allows bending of the wood, while **toasting** the

inside of the barrel changes aromatic compounds within the oak. Depending on heat source, time and temperature, heavier toasting releases more spice, smoke and clove-like characters, while a medium toast enhances vanilla, grilled almond and the like. We select medium toasted oak for Ferngrove wines, as we much prefer the quality of the fruit to be the major focus of the wine.

Oak is very variable and of considerable interest to a winemaker, promoting different flavours, styles and profiles, but by far the most important aspect is **cooper consistency**. We place far more weight on a good understanding and relationship with our coopers, who in return provide consistent, high quality oak for our best produce.

During maturation, we allow a wine like our Estate Merlot a period in oak to add a positive aromatic influence, not toasty, chippy or chabby, but just a nice lift to the aroma of fresh spice and a hint of vanilla. This vintage we aged the Estate Shiraz in oak for 12 months, a mixture of mature one, two and three year old French.

With something like the Symbols Shiraz Viognier, we tend to prefer a lightly looser grain of oak such as European oak provides, which gives the wine more intensity in the mid palate while undertaking a relatively



shorter maturation than our other red wines. Being highly aromatic, the Shiraz Viognier can handle the oak nicely, and benefits from the uptake of some oak tannin. Our choice of European oak is also toasted to medium plus, which adds a little more spice to the wine.

Team snapshot



Jason relaxing with Natalie, Tabatha and Ben

WORKING for "undoubtedly one of WA's financially strongest and most promising wine companies" is the big attraction of the job for Ferngrove's chief financial officer and company secretary Jason Markwart.

Jason recalls he came to Ferngrove in 2002 at what was the beginning of a difficult period for the wine industry, marked by oversupply, reduced prices and increased competition. "We have thrived because the quality of our wines remained excellent and as a result we were able to rapidly grow the business during what was arguably the toughest period the Australian wine industry has faced," he says.

The most rewarding aspect of the job, besides

working with what he describes as "a highly energetic, passionate and professional team," is where Ferngrove is today; in a very strong financial position, with the right culture and an excellent product to work with. "These factors are very important for a successful business."

When he's not number-crunching, Jason spends most of his spare time umpiring junior footy, studying for his MBA, trying to keep fit or "mucking around with the kids" – Tabatha (11) and Ben (9) at their south-of-the-river menagerie of multiple dogs, cats, birds and fish... followed by his "absolute perfect finish to any day" – wife Natalie's chicken fettucine with a glass or two of Cossack Riesling.