



# In Vino Veritas

Starting a cellar is one of the best decisions you will ever make. Learn how to build an enviable wine collection as **Winsor Dobbin** shares his insider's know-how.

**C**reating a wine cellar is an investment – but not in the traditional sense.

You'll be investing in the pleasure of collecting something beautiful, and in the opportunity to drink some wonderful wines when they are at their very best.

Don't expect to make money from buying and selling wine. You need to be an expert to have any chance of success. Your only chance of making a motza is to jump on the bandwagon of the next big thing before it becomes the 'next big thing'.

If, however, you buy wines that you know you will enjoy drinking five years, 10 years or even longer down the track, then you can't go wrong.

You'll be able to pull a mature wine out of your cellar and enjoy it with friends for the retail price you paid several years earlier.

## GETTING STARTED

The key to building a good cellar is choosing your wines with care and attention. Try before you buy and purchase in dozen lots, both to save money and to be able to enjoy bottles on a regular basis as your wine develops.

The No. 1 rule is to be sure you'll want to drink the wines you have purchased. Certain styles do not lend themselves to cellaring and can be ruled out straight away; sauvignon blancs, semillon/sauvignon blanc blends and fresh fruity styles like pinot gris/grigio are best enjoyed in their lively youth.

If you do want to cellar white wines, opt for semillon or riesling or, in the short term,

chardonnay, which is usually best within five or six years of vintage.

Most reds cellar well, but there are exceptions to every rule and it pays to take advice.

Companies like International Fine Wines in Melbourne and the Ultimo Wine Centre in Sydney sell high quality wines from both Australia and Europe and will be happy to offer guidance if you are a serious buyer. There are also consultants who can help newcomers, but just as your investment advisor should be completely independent, so should your wine advisor. If you are brave enough to go it alone, it may be confronting.

A wine expert might head unerringly to a bottle of Wendouree shiraz, or zoom in on that rare Curlewis reserve pinot noir from Geelong. For the uninitiated, however, the task of choosing the right bottle is right up there with backing the winner of the Melbourne Cup.

## WHAT TO BUY

Assuming you don't have the budget to buy first-growth Bordeaux or grand cru Burgundies (expensive hobbies at the best of times), you'll probably be buying Australian wines to lie down for a few years. Because the wine industry in Australia is a relatively new one, some wine companies planted inappropriate grapes in inappropriate areas.

The French have been making wine for centuries; they learnt from experience that chardonnay and pinot are ideal for the conditions in Burgundy and

that cabernet sauvignon and merlot work best in Bordeaux.

The terroir of each region is suitable for certain grapes – and buying from the correct region means you should avoid the pitfalls of weedy, green cabernets and insipid pinots that should not be cellared for a nanosecond.

If you enjoy cabernet sauvignon (a variety that cellars particularly well), then accepted wisdom is that it is hard to go too far wrong with wines from Coonawarra in South Australia and Margaret River in Western Australia.

Names that traditionally cellar well include Majella, Katnook Estate, Balnaves and Bowen Estate. From Margaret River zero in on Cullen, Cape Mentelle and Leeuwin Estate, but also lesser-known names like Voyager Estate, Hamelin Bay and Watershed.

If dry rieslings are your tippie of choice, then you should look for wines from the Clare and Eden Valley regions of South Australia, or the even cooler climes of Tasmania. Among the best riesling producers are Jeffrey Grosset, Kilikanoon, Mitchell, Paulett and Pikes.

If pinot noir, that most capricious of grapes, is what floats your boat, you'll be best served by looking for wines from the Yarra Valley,

Mornington Peninsula and Geelong in Victoria, or from Tasmania. Australia's best pinot producers include By Farr, Curlewis, Bannockburn, Paringa Estate, Bass Phillip, Apsley Gorge and newcomer Hurley Vineyard.

With shiraz, the archetypal Australian big, bold red, you probably won't want to go past the vineyards of the Barossa Valley and McLaren Vale. Big names include Penfolds, Peter Lehmann and Geoff Merrill, but also look at smaller wineries like Torbreck and Coriole.

If you like your shiraz a little more savoury, then you'll probably enjoy the wines from Victoria (the Grampians, Pyrenees and Heathcote) – think Seppelt or Heathcote Estate – and the cellaring prospects from the Hunter Valley.

Chardonnay, Australia's favourite white of the moment, seems to grow well just about anywhere from Tumbarumba to Stanthorpe, but some of the very best are coming from the Victorian town of Beechworth, home to names like Giaconda and Smiths Vineyard. The Adelaide Hills, Geelong and Margaret River are also among the best bets for chardonnay.

For semillon, wines from Hunter producers like Tyrrell's, McWilliam's Mount Pleasant and Brokenwood are always long-lived.

Don't be afraid to gamble on a new name or unfamiliar variety, but the bulk of your collection should be proven performers.

## GETTING STORAGE RIGHT

No matter how many wines you want to cellar, you'll have to store them properly. It is no good putting wines under the bed or in the cupboard for a decade and expecting them to taste good.

For wine to mature properly, variations in temperature must be eliminated. Humidity and direct sunlight should also be avoided at all costs. That means buying a refrigerated storage device like those made by EuroCave, which allow for constant monitoring of humidity levels and temperature.

Another alternative is putting your wines into air-conditioned storage facilities offered by companies like Wine Ark in Sydney, the Winebank in Melbourne and Wineaway in Brisbane.

*Cheers!*

*Winsor Dobbin is a Sydney-based journalist who has been writing about wine for almost two decades. He spent five years living in France and now writes about wine for the Sun-Herald newspaper and a number of magazines.*

## WINES TO START YOUR CELLAR



### Grosset 2006 Polish Hill Riesling

Probably Australia's best dry riesling from vintage to vintage and a proven success when it comes to cellaring. Austere and citrusy when young, it will develop beautifully. \$40.



### Brokenwood 2006 Hunter Valley Semillon

Hunter semillon is crisp and lean in its youth but develops wonderful toasty/honeyed characters as it develops in the bottle. This is a lovely young drink but the balance and structure mean it will age gracefully. \$18.



### Seppelt St Peters 2004 Grampians Shiraz

This is a great Australian red that is drinking well now, but will improve over time. It is robustly flavoured with some lovely blackberry characters prominent but also wonderfully elegant. \$65.



### Majella 2004 Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon

Coonawarra cabernets are invariably good prospects for ageing and I can vouch for the fact that the wines from Majella develop delightfully over a decade or so. A plump, ripe wine with tons of flavour. \$35.