



PHOTOGRAPH DAVID HANNAN, TOURISM VICTORIA

VINEYARDS ON VICTORIA'S MORNINGTON PENINSULA

VICTORIA IS HOME TO WHAT ARE BELIEVED TO BE SOME of the world's oldest vines, surprising in their diversity. Some, like pinot meunier, dolcetto and marsanne, are better known to seriously interested tasters. Others, like shiraz and cabernet, are part of the beating heart of Australian wine.

A number of Victorian wineries have recently marked 150 years, an achievement with benefits all Australians can share. Last year one of the icons of Australian wine, Tahbilk (which lost the reference to Chateau along the way), enjoyed its anniversary and Best's Great Western blew out its candles in May.

Old wine companies survive thanks to a tapestry of belief, good soil and often long family tenure, and this is the case with Tahbilk and Best's. The Purbricks at Tahbilk have stood guardian since 1926 and the current owners of Best's Great Western, the Thomson family, since 1912.

The stewardship of these families has insured the maintenance of interesting vineyards and fascinating winery buildings, and encouraged the habit of keeping old vines. Old vines were not generally kept or valued during the technical boom, which started in the 1960s, outside those owned by custodian families. Today, however, old vines are prized for their "heritage benefits" and the knowledge they provide winemakers.

In the case of Best's, vines planted in 1868 included 141 pinot noir vines, which are believed to be the oldest pinot noir in the world. These are comingled with pinot meunier of the same age.

Tahbilk has a 1928 planting of marsanne believed to be the oldest and most magnificent old shiraz, as well as cabernet planted in 1868. The great loser has been verdelho, widely planted in Victoria in 1900. It could not withstand the fungal diseases introduced in the late 1800s to Australia.

Life in a family wine company deals each generation a deck of cards in the form of their vineyards. Re-shuffling (as in replanting) is always an option, but Viv Thompson of Best's never considered pulling up his 1868 plantings. What Best's has in common with many great wine families is a respect for the old vines tradition, while remaining agile and evolving. Internationally, its peers of similar vision and character include Ridge in California, which has old vine 'field blend' zinfandels, and top Bordeaux and Mosel wine families in Europe.

When Best's threw its anniversary party earlier this year, Viv extended the invitation to his 'family' of winemakers. Together they showcased wines they had made, telling stories to celebrate

their shared lives; a testament to the necessary support network that this length of tenure requires.

To bottle time demands an awareness of the grander scheme, that an old vine wine doesn't represent simply the work of one man, but the legacy of many. This awareness has provided Best's with several slices of history. Its Bin 0 Shiraz has been continuously produced since the 1880s and is one of Australia's longest consecutively labelled varietals. It shows how different wine is to other consumer products, in this day of trumped-up, short life cycle, churn and burn brands. It is worth seeking out for the taste as well as the story. 

Rob Geddes is a Master of Wine.

Wonderful wine country

Within a 160 kilometre radius of Melbourne you can enjoy the greatest number and diversity of premium wine regions of any city on earth – from sparkling to dessert wine, the Victorians don't miss a style.

Eastern and Southern Victoria have the dress circle: the Yarra, Geelong, Sunbury, Macedon and Mornington regions, which have a maritime climate. These are recognised regions for chardonnay, pinot gris and pinot noir. Sparkling of note comes from the southern Yarra Valley where the high vineyards are cool and have fine acidity. Sunbury has shiraz at Craiglee, and Macedon has a very diverse range from sparkling to peppery shiraz.

Gippsland in the deep southeast is an iconic pinot noir producer with Bass Phillip, and the southwest has Crawford River riesling and the Drumborg vineyard in Henty.

Within a day's return trip north of Melbourne is the 'spice belt', where shiraz is the star. Pepper is the common thread across wines from this part of Victoria. White pepper running into clove lies in wines from the higher, colder Mount Langi region; Heathcote wines show blueberry and spice with fabulous tannins; and the Pyrenees region produces dark, slightly bay leaf and minty, shiraz. The outer circle has the Grampians' Great Western region, which produces dark brooding shiraz.

top drops



Pooles Rock Post Office 2014 Shiraz (\$60, 95/100)

Quality complexity red licorice, redcurrant fruits, stylish cedar oak. The ripe fruits have sweetness which sets up the palate. It has a regal style with balance and length, and concentrated knitted tannins and flavours that will expand with time.



Koonara Wines Ambriel's Gift 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$40, 92/100)

The balance tilts towards subtle vanilla and toffee oak as a youngster, and there are notes of dark spices, old cinnamon and cloves. The palate delivers the house-style silky tannins, creating a satiny entry that flows long and even. There is the faintest hint of mint on the blackcurrant rich-fruited palate.



Longview Vineyard Devil's Elbow 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$30, 94/100)

Plenty of ripeness, blackcurrant up front, and leafy subtle mint fruits; soya sauce rancio note adds complexity. The palate is straighter than the devil's elbow: long ripe fruits wed to fine tannin and live happily ever after with blackcurrant juice flavours and tannin finesse. A sweet mint wrapper edge to the end. Moreish.



Bleasdale The Petrel 2014 Shiraz/Cabernet/Malbec (\$30, 96/100)

Good from the get go with fresh blackberry, blackcurrant and red fruit notes running seamlessly into cedar and oriental spiced oak notes. In the mouth it has a lovely weight and lively length and style, showing plush tannins and depth of flavour. White pepper and piquant tannins on the finish.



Tahbilk Old Vines 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon/Shiraz (\$44.95, 95/100)

The aromas are cellaring-style reserved and muscular dark berry. It has a top note of red fruits with a background of oak; good balance and harmony. The palate is ripe and even, the acid balance is ideal for food. Long mulberry, blueberry and spice flavours with fine tannin on the finish.



Tertini Wines Private Cellar Collection 2015 Chardonnay (\$40, 95/100)

Well-handled subtlety, white fruit, laid-back complexity showing cedar, vanilla cream delicacy and oak. It has oak, yeast lees, varietal white fruit flavour and a medium-bodied structure, which trips across the tongue with subtle complexity. Being awed by elegance is no easy achievement with chardonnay.

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