

Wizards of Oz

What's hot from Brand Australia.



The Globetrotting Wine Guy

Legendians Bin 65 Chardonnay from Southcorp led the way with a "New World" taste profile that was hard to beat for the money. Then came all the other big guys. Now the wines of Australia rank second only to Italy in terms of total wine imports into the United States. The major producers offer consistent, great value, but what about something new?

What's now considered Aussie edge is no longer your friendly tank farm Chardonnay or Cabernet-Shiraz, "It's the wines from small family estates, from delimited wine regions," says Ken Onish, president of Southern Starz, the foremost importer of Aussie family estate wines to the United States. Onish says, "The four biggest Australian producers, BRL Hardy, Southcorp, Beringer Blass Wine Estates, and Orlando Wyndham have dominated the global Aussie scene and been considered everything Australia has to offer, but smaller estates are now being exported." That something new has arrived.

The new wave of Aussie standouts are all considered regional stars, rather than national brand names, so forward thinking operators are moving beyond simple appellations and identifying their wines by region. As Americans learn the geography of Australia, they will begin to know whether they prefer the soft, plush style of Langhorne Creek with its coffee, mocha, berry flavors or possibly the stars of other regions within South Australia, such as the Barossa Valley, Clare, Adelaide Hills or McLaren Vale.

Examples of new Aussie estate stars available from local wholesalers in most major markets across the United States include (with average prices): Ross Estate Shiraz 2000 (Barossa Valley) at about \$13.33; Reilly's Cabernet Sauvignon 2000 (Clare Valley) at \$18.67; Bleasdale Cabernet/Shiraz 2001 (Langhorne Creek) at \$8.67; Margan Family Winery Semillon 2000 (Hunter Valley) at \$8.67; Water Wheel Cabernet 2000 (Bendigo) at \$10.00; and Nugan Family Estate Chardonnay 2001 (Griffith) at \$8.00.

"Brand Australia" has reinvented itself. And if its ambitious goal of dominating the global premium wine market by 2025 seemed off track, it now appears space shuttle Australia has found the added thrust it needs to head into orbit on schedule. Let the rest of the wine world beware: Australia is flowering with all the colors of the rainbow and there is no end in sight. Cheers.

Fred Tibbitts, president Fred Tibbitts & Associates, is the foremost wine by the glass consultant for chain hotels and restaurants in the world.

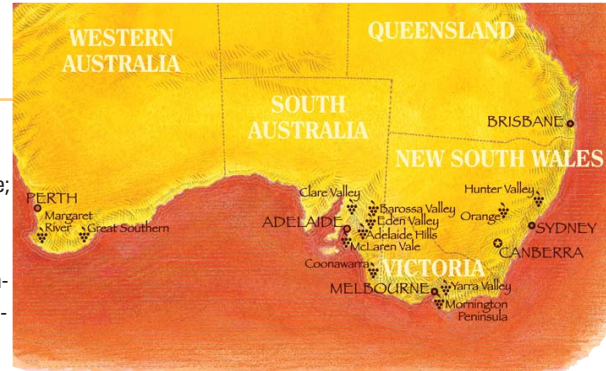
TRENDS PERFECT PAIRING

How do you make every Aussie wine match-up a heavenly one? You've got to do it yourself. Executive Winery Chef Jeffrey Starr at Trincherro Family Estates makes it his mission. He builds the ideal dish to complement each specific wine, and he teaches chefs how to do it.

Australia, like the United States, has different terroirs and winemaker methods, so you can't make meaningful generalizations about pairing. "Before you get into mirroring flavors, you have to deal with taste balance," says Starr. "Anything you eat or drink is going to affect the next thing. You brush your teeth and

then drink orange juice; everyone knows how awful that tastes. It's sweetness in the toothpaste that makes acidity in the orange juice taste bad. Wine works the same way. It's primarily acidic, so you have to be very careful of sweet and savory flavors that will heighten that acidity and throw the wine off." Chef Starr will adjust the flavoring of a dish to bring the wine back to neutral. "If the wine tastes acidic, I'll bump the acidity in the dish to balance. If I'm tasting strong tannin, I'll look at boosting the salt in the dish to neutralize it."

Strong spices are another tricky topic. "They activate the palette and tend to make wine hot and alcoholic. Try to balance strong spices with other flavors." In general, sour and salty tastes



bring out fruit flavors in wines, while sweet and savory tastes bring out the acid and tannins.

After you've balanced the wine, the next level is heightening positive qualities by mirroring flavor and body. For instance, "Australian Shiraz is noted for its smoky, bacony flavor, so grilled meats, smoked meats, and sausages mirror this flavor well. The

syrah grape is an old Australian planting, so the Shiraz quality is very high compared with younger vines in other countries. A Sauvignon Blanc from Orange may have a grapefruit flavor you can bring out by increasing the acidity in a meal." Glasses ready? Let the kitchen taste tests begin.

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SERVER PAIRING TIPS

- If a guest orders a heavy, creamy dish, let them know they can try a more aggressive wine. The fat content coats the mouth and dulls the wine.
- If they're ordering a sweet dessert, be sure their dessert wine or champagne is at least as sweet. Otherwise, the wine will taste sour in comparison.
- If a patron is concerned about the tannin taste in their wine, share this hint: A pinch of salt on their food neutralizes the tannin flavor and might save the check!



HOT WINES FROM COOL ORANGE

Australia's latest micro-climate darling is Orange, and Steve Franchetti of Trincherro Family Estates knows the turf. "Trincherro is the largest vineyard owner in Orange," with 2,200 acres contributing to its Reynolds wines. The most notable feature of Orange is the extinct volcano

Mount Canobolis at its heart. The volcanic basalt over limestone along with the highest elevation wine region in Australia combine to create a unique, exciting group of wines. Master Winemaker Jon Reynolds is betting his reserve wines on it, "We look for a vineyard sight that has the well-drained red mountain earth over limestone, a well-recognized feature of the Orange region," says Reynolds. Franchetti explains, "If a wine has the appellation of Southeastern Australia, it can be pulling grapes from a huge region the size of the entire western United States, with wide variations in climate and quality. As an estate brand, our vineyards are all in and immediately around Orange in New South Wales." Trincherro's state-of-the-art winery was completed in March 2000, and Orange itself is a very young wine-making region. "What's exciting," says Franchetti, "is the climate is similar to Bordeaux in terms of mean temperature and climate, though we do get more sunshine. The climate is cool, grapes stay on the vine longer, maturing at a more natural rate. For instance, a Shiraz from Orange won't be as peppery as one from Barossa valley. They're very food friendly." The critics seem to agree. Reynolds has been recognized as a best value in almost every category by *Wine Spectator* and *Wine Enthusiast*. —JPB