

Serving some early aces

Quality and control put Kooyong on the scoreboard.

Things are tough out there in wine land. New companies and brands are appearing at a frenzied pace: each week, I reckon I come across at least ten new labels in bottle shops, on wine lists and touring wine regions, plus another five or more that arrive on my doorstep hoping for a good review. It quickly adds up to hundreds of new labels jostling for attention.

Not surprisingly, many are really struggling to get noticed. But some, such as Kooyong, a relatively new winery on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, are doing very well. After just three vintage releases, Kooyong's chardonnay and pinot are selling well through Vintage Cellars, independent stores, top restaurants and in export markets such as the US.

So how has Kooyong managed to succeed where others still struggle? What makes this brand different?

For a start, the venture is generously funded by owners Chris and Gail Aylward. Sure, it is possible to make great wine on the smell of an oily rag – but it doesn't half help if you can afford to design and build exactly the winery you want, spend money on the best French oak barrels and hire the best people.

This is the second crucial factor, of course: get the right people. Kooyong is winemaker/manager Sandro Mosele's first full-scale job in the wine industry (prior to which he was a geneticist and had managed a small vineyard), but he talks – and makes – wines like he's been involved in the game for decades.

Despite the fact that the vineyard – chardonnay and pinot noir planted on the yellow sandstone gravelly clays in the warmer, northern part of the peninsula – has yielded just five crops, each vintage has seen Mosele trialling different clones, different winemaking techniques, endlessly searching to improve things. As he puts it, he's trying to squeeze centuries of experience into a few short years.

Experienced and well-connected wine consultant Grant Van Every (you may know him as a presenter on SBS's *The Wine Lover's Guide to Australia*) has been instrumental in securing those good export and local sales, as well as developing the simple, stylish look of Kooyong's packaging.

Crucially, too, Sandro Mosele knows what he's aiming for, and how to get it. "I have a belief that you have to control everything if you want to make wine properly. It costs us up to \$4000 a tonne to grow our own fruit the way we want to here. We could buy good peninsula pinot for \$2500 – but I think you can taste in the wine the soil of where the grapes are grown, and it is important that our wine tastes of our property."

The packaging reflects this philosophy: it's dead simple, with nothing extraneous on the label distracting from the name of the estate, the variety and the region. No gimmicks, no pictures; it's a blank canvas onto which the consumer can project a personal significance after enjoying the wine inside the bottle.

And at the end of the day, this is really the only secret to Kooyong's success worth worrying about. The first two vintages, 1999 and 2000, were good – clearly better than many other wines on the peninsula. They turned heads. The recently released 2001s (and yet-to-be-released 2001 reserve wines) will shift the winery's reputation up a couple more notches: the chardonnays are wonderfully complex, alluring, satisfying; the pinots are incredibly restrained but deep-tasting.

The message is simple: make better wine and you'll get noticed, no matter how many other labels are crowding the market.

For more info on Kooyong – including a list of stockists (why don't all winery Web sites provide this service?) – visit www.kooyong.com or e-mail wines@kooyong.com, or telephone (03) 5989 7355. ☉

THE FULL BOTTLE 2002 Scorpo Pinot Gris \$28

Sandro Mosele also makes some stunning wines for the Scorpo family from grapes grown on their small Mornington Peninsula property. This just-released pinot gris is a knockout glass of luxurious, full-bodied white, with exotic, heady flavours of overripe beurre bosc pears and spiced apricots. Visit www.scorpowines.com.au or call (03) 9813 3312 for more details.

