



Good mornington shiraz

Wine lovers are warming to the cooler-climate shirazes. The distinctive drops coming out of Victoria's Mornington Peninsula prove why

TEXT SALLY GUDGEON

AUSTRALIANS ARE NOT SLOW TO SING THE PRAISES of shiraz. It is as much a part of our national identity as Waltzing Matilda. We love the big, gutsy and ripe warm-climate styles, but are increasingly growing fond of the subtlety and elegance of wines from cooler areas, too. The Mornington Peninsula is one such region. It is noted for the quality of its pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot gris, but not shiraz. In the enthusiasm to match specific grapes to specific wine regions, has the viability of some varieties been overlooked? Is Mornington shiraz one of the great unsung heroes?

George Kefford planted the first shiraz on the Mornington Peninsula at Merricks Estate in 1978. At the time, the only other vineyards on the peninsula were Main Ridge and Elgee Park. His was the first of many Mornington shirazes to do well on the show circuit. Paringa Estate, Turramurra Estate and, more recently, Box Stallion have an exceptional show record. Lindsay McCall, of Paringa Estate, is particularly proud of the trophy his 1993 Shiraz won in the Australia vs South Africa Wine Challenge, where it beat Grange and Hill of Grace.

Shiraz lives on a knife-edge on the Mornington. Maybe for this reason it has always had its detractors. Many producers who have had negative experiences with the variety – green and underripe wines – have grafted over it with more popular varieties. Shiraz does not perform well in the region if it is planted in the wrong site, if cropping levels are too high or if the wrong viticultural techniques are used, leading to vines becoming out of balance.

Where shiraz thrives on the Mornington, however, it sings. And when it sings, it does so with a pure voice humming with notes of white pepper and spice. It is often likened to a northern Rhône-style wine owing to its distinctive perfume, sophisticated structure and supple, silky tannins. Rather than being an unsung hero, some would argue it's a well-kept secret. Many echo the comment of Frank Osborn, of Osborns: "People often ask for shiraz at cellar door, and we have no problems selling it."

For the variety to do well, it needs a sheltered, north-facing position with a trellising system that allows air and light to penetrate effectively. It also seems to prefer lower altitudes. McCall controls the variety's triffid-like tendencies by using the lyre trellising system. Other growers have had success in opening up the