

In the sign of Scorpo

It seems only yesterday that Paul and Caroline Scorpo started transforming their piece of excellent earth at Merricks North, the site of an old orchard, to grow vines and produce wines they loved (think pinot noir and chardonnay). But where does the time go? That was more than a decade ago. And while still a small enterprise, there are now several more wines in the Scorpo line-up – an outstanding rich and full-bodied pinot gris that sells out too soon after being released, an estate shiraz, rosè, and two wines sourced from around the Mornington Peninsula – noirièn, an old French word for pinot noir and aubaine, a synonym for chardonnay and both hovering around a respectable \$28. It's not enough though. They've just settled on a long lease at Tussie Mussie farm, a boutique retreat at Merricks, where nearly three hectares will be planted to pinot gris and pinot noir in a couple of months. Talk about being in the right place at the right time. As a landscape architect by day, Paul was working on the property. "It's an exciting project and a fabulous site," he says. Of the most recent wine additions, the just-released 2007 noirièn and aubaine are arguably the best to date but on preference, the pinot has the edge. It's a wine that's been made since 2004 and the idea behind it was to create a village wine, a la Burgundy, where fruit is sourced from the district while still very much being a regional wine. And the impetus for aubaine, first made in 2007, was

to create a chablis-style wine, says Paul, as it's aged in mostly old oak. While it doesn't have the flintiness or tight crunchy acidity of many a chablis, aubaine is nonetheless a charming wine. Aubaine and noirièn are meant to be enjoyed young whereas the estate wines are built for and benefit from some ageing. So, in the past 10 years, have there been any major changes? "Vineyard management and refinement in the winemaking mostly," he says. A huge job has been changing the trellising so that the vines are now lower at 900 centimetres, creating an environment for more even ripening and better balance. As with the winemaking, the estate reds are left in barrel longer to assist in the wine's clarification; with the whites, since 2004 there has been no batonnage and the result is a finer expression of chardonnay and an overall fresher wine plus there's no malolactic fermentation either. "The peninsula produces these amazing mouth-watering and approachable acids that I don't see anywhere else in Australia. We want to retain that acidity and while most people think our (white) wines go through malo, the complexity is already there in the wine." The only thing missing is a proper cellar door but that's on the cards, too. The Scorpas hope to have one built next year and designed in part by their youngest daughter, Claire, who is finishing a MA in architecture.

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SCORPO SHIRAZ 2006 \$43

Boy, this is one terrific shiraz and while it will benefit from some cellar age, you can enjoy it now by decanting and letting it breathe. It will open up to reveal a core of vibrant sweetish red and black fruits, touch of sour plum, with savoury and spicy undertones such as star anise, then builds and fills the palate with fine tannins and judicious oak handling.



SCORPO CHARDONNAY 2006 \$39

The estate chardonnay has always been about texture and it's rich but not heavy or overt. There are ripe pear and crunchy tangy pineapple notes, restrained nutty leesy notes that are deliciously mouth-filling with the oak neatly integrated and resulting in a really tasty wine. Guaranteed the bottle will be empty before lunch is over.



SCORPO PINOT NOIR 2006 \$43

With every sip, this charming, moreish wine reveals itself more. There are spice notes wound around tangy cherry fruit, pippy, there's even a hint of roses alongside a touch of eucalypt. Silky tannins, a creamy mid-palate and oak that's barely there but all adding to its excellent structure and length.

