



Ray Jordan
drink it

Tasting Notes Chardonnay

Going for gold

Cullen Wines' annual chardonnay tasting featured impressive wines from across the globe and Australia

At the annual Cullen chardonnay tasting in Margaret River, it was refreshing to see the heavily overworked wines of previous years replaced by wines of style and finesse. There was still a degree of funkiness but, in the main, wines showed greater purity and varietal integrity than in previous years. I gave one of the US wines a gold medal: a first.

My main criticism in the past has been the degree to which US winemakers have worked the lees to the point of producing that distinctive burnt-match pong that masks the wonderful fruit flavours and aromas that chardonnay can deliver. Mind you, you can still see some excess in French wines but with breathing they tend to clean up and display their greatness.

This year's Cullen tasting featured the wines from the 2004 vintage chosen from the best chardonnay producers from around the world.

From the US contingent the Napa Valley Kongsgaard was an exceptional wine of richness and depth with complex aromas and flavours of roasted almond butterscotch and smoky bacon, all delivered with a deft touch and light hand.

The other three, the Aubert Ritchie Vineyard, Peter Michael Belle Cote and the Rochioli River Block, all rated well on my score sheet. I hope the changes evident in this tasting continue into next year and are not merely a vintage aberration.

Once again the Margaret River region provided wonderful highlights, reinforcing the region's reputation as Australia's best chardonnay area. The

Leeuwin Estate Art Series topped the pool yet again with its opulent, powerful and deep lingering flavours.

The Brookland Valley Reserve was another gold medal wine for me. This brand has already established itself as one of the State's best with the winemakers continuing to evolve the style with its distinctive grapefruit citrus and light toasty mineral influence.

The Voyager Estate, too, was a super wine and shows that the leaner, tighter style that has developed into almost a house style for this excellent producer.

The other Margaret River wines in the line-up, such as the Cullen, Devil's Lair, Vasse Felix Heytesbury and the incredible value-for-money Juniper Crossing, were hard to separate, collectively showing the power and opulence that are much a part of this region.

Two wines from Pemberton, the Houghton and the Wise, also rated highly on my score sheet. This cool viticultural region is ideally suited to chardonnay.

Among the rest of Australia, the remarkable Giaconda from Beechworth once more was right up on the leader board, although this wine was particularly closed and mute, suggesting its best years are ahead of it. Penfolds Yattarna has emerged over the past few years as one of Australia's finest chardonnays and this wine makes a strong statement for the tight finely textured style of complexity and elegance.

The French wines were very good, being from an exceptional vintage. In the meantime I have found some new release chardonnays to interest you.



Innocent Bystander chardonnay 2007 (\$19.95)

I suppose you could say this is Giant Steps entry-level wine but it's a lot better than that. Minerally mealy aromas with touches of nectarine and quince. The palate is lean and slightly angular with a fresh crunchy feel. Great value wine. 89/100



Heggies chardonnay 2007 (\$26.95)

Lovely fine and delicate chardonnay expressing notes of peaches and citrus with an overlay of baked custard. The palate is beautifully textured with lingering smoky and ever so slightly toasty flavours infused into the quality chardonnay. 89/100



Scorpio Aubaine chardonnay 2007 (\$28)

I liked this quality chardonnay from the first sniff. Complex mix of meal, lemon zest and roasted nuts on the nose. The palate is deep and penetrating with a fine long palate controlled with fine acid and some nice oak treatment. A little lees influence adds some complexity. 91/100



Domaine Chandon chardonnay 2007 (\$26.95)

A well-presented chardonnay built on rich fruit from the dry Yarra vintage of 2007 with the further enhancement of lees stirring and oak. It's been expertly brought together to deliver a creamy intense chardonnay for drinking over the next few years. 89/100

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Mixologist
Mark McKenzie

Rob Roy

65

1



50ml Chivas Regal scotch
20ml sweet vermouth
dash Angostura bitters