

Wine trends Jeni Port

Everything old is new again

When the talk turns to hip styles, take the cork from a familiar variety.

For the past decade, most of the new trends in wine drinking have been reprises of the oldest.

Remember unwooded chardonnay? It heralded a return to the days of the generic Australian "chablis", that is, a crisp unwooded white, although not made from semillon grapes. Nothing really new there. Riesling had a brief fall from grace in the 1980s with the rise of chardonnay but has returned to our hearts in the past few years. This, and the current rage for sauvignon blanc, shows that classic varieties never die – they just retire for a while.

Shiraz is another, perhaps the best, example of everything old being new again.

So topping my list for "the next big thing" are two varieties that have been out of the picture for a while. Producers have stuck by them, which is reassuring, and the exceptional quality of the latest examples is even more so. The varieties? Cabernet sauvignon and semillon, which have provided some of my most enjoyable recent drinking.

Perhaps it's a knee-jerk reaction to so many ordinary shirazes, but cabernet is a welcome return to normality after the artifice of many shirazes.

The old names keep bobbing up. I've fallen for Penfolds Bin 407 all over again. The little brother to Bin 707 is under-rated, if not ignored, yet the 2001 is a stunning example of Aussie cabernet at its

best. Its lively blackcurrant fruit, dusty, fine tannins and subtle style point to a wine that deserves greater attention.

Before shiraz took over, the likes of Yarra Valley's Oakridge and De Bortoli were making some wonderful cabernet; the variety still could be regarded as their strength. The new Oakridge 2001 cabernet has a warm, savoury heart that is light-years away from the taut, angular impression some drinkers might have of the variety.

Coonawarra has taken to shiraz, a sound business decision given the climate. Yet producers such as Majella, Leconfield and Bowen Estate remind us of what we have been missing out on from this classic cabernet region.

Semillon producers keep trying their hearts out but we're oblivious to their good wines. Peter Lehmann semillon just walks off wine lists and does a roaring job in the discount chains, yet its momentum has not translated to bigger sales of semillon from other makers – Mount Horrocks, Moss Wood, Tyrrell's, Kilikanoon, and Brokenwood are out there waiting to be rediscovered.

The thing about "the next big thing" is that, to take off, you need critical mass. You need believers in the wine, you need them in numbers that can sustain a marketing push and you need time.



Makers and wine writers can get excited about nebbiolo, saperavi, tounga or even zinfandel for that matter, but the volume for these varieties, many of them still in their embryonic stages, is not there to create any widespread interest with drinkers. Inconsistent quality keeps them from becoming the next big thing just yet.

Dues must be paid; it seems pinot gris almost has paid in full. Heading into summer, there's a lot of upbeat talk about the grape among retailers and restaurateurs, much of it warranted.

The Alsatian-style pinot gris can be too fat, oily and flabby. Learning from past mistakes, many producers now are presenting it as a bright, aromatic, spicy white with a rich middle palate. Scorpo, on the Mornington Peninsula, gets top

Budburst: pinot grigio is heading for growth.