



It's pretty country which grows arguably the most beautiful wine to match

Ken Gargett



THE Mornington Peninsula vineyards hold a biennial Celebration of Pinot Noir. It is not restricted to their own efforts, but attracts those curious world travellers, the pinotphiles who attend these events at every opportunity, wherever they are held in the world.

No other grape has anything like this following. The event also attracts makers from around the globe and the highlight of the 2007 event was the attendance of Aubert de Villaine from the glorious Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. He showed his 2004 wines to a rapt audience.

The next Celebration will be in February 2009 (bookings: mpva@mpva.com.au) but be warned, tickets sell out incredibly quickly.

Mornington does a wonderful job with the event and for anyone with an interest in terrific pinot. This beautiful region, so close to Melbourne, is a must-visit, even if you cannot make the Celebration. It can be easily done on a day trip from Melbourne but staying there is a much better option. Surrounded by Bass Strait and two bays, Port Phillip and Western Port, great B&Bs and restaurants abound and views can be spectacular.

Wine lovers in Queensland will be familiar with many of the larger

producers from the region, though this is not the place for mass-produced wines, and there are many excellent smaller makers to visit. The Peninsula's location ensures a maritime climate with reasonably high summer rainfall and humidity. It also delivers the advantage of late ripening, though weather conditions may sometimes make it seem less of an advantage and more of a disincentive.

Although much of what the region likes the outside world to focus on is the pinot, it is worth noting that there is much more. Stonier's sparkling wines, especially the 2003 Cuvee, are classy wines exhibiting balance and elegance. Not surprisingly, the white Burgundian sibling of pinot, chardonnay, is the region's other star. Indeed, some suggest it outstrips pinot. Stonier, again, Yabby Lake, Kooyong, Willow Creek, Montalto, Dromana, Miceli, Foxey's Hangout, Moorooduc Estate, Port Phillip Estate, Scorpo Wines, Tuck's Ridge and Ten Minutes by Tractor are some of the 60-odd wineries on the Peninsula (of which, a high percentage have cellar doors open to the public) that are making noteworthy chardonnay.

T'Gallant led the way for the development of pinot gris in this country and the region is still considered as one of the most suited to that variety. There are patches of sauvignon blanc and a few, notably Paradigm Hill, are making impressive riesling. Mantons Creek does gewurztraminer (as well as a still pinot meunier and a tempranillo). Eldridge makes gamay and also semillon. Early plantings of cabernet sauvignon have

proved less than exciting and most have been removed. Some enjoyable rose is made and there are exciting efforts with shiraz. Paringa Estate's is wonderful, but pinot has left other reds in its wake.

The Peninsula has approximately 1000 hectares of vines with just under half that devoted to pinot noir.

There is evidence that wine was made on the Peninsula as far back as 1886. By 1891, at least 14 wineries were in operation but most were gone by the 1920s.

Seppelt had vineyards there from the 1950s but they were destroyed by fire in 1967. Elgee Park began planting again in 1972, based on a suggestion by David Wynn of the eponymous Coonawarra winery. Owner Baillieu Myer obtained 400 cuttings of the Bordeaux blend varieties and also riesling. The first wines, from 1975, were made by Ian Hinckinbotham and his son Stephen. Ian has been one of the great driving forces of the Australian wine industry for decades while Stephen, before his tragic death in a small plane, was quickly developing a reputation as one of our finest winemakers.

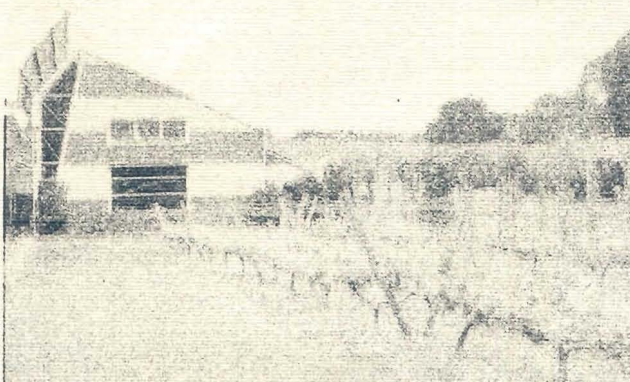
In 1988, Myer planted pinot noir but this small winery is perhaps best known as the first in Australia to plant viognier (and possibly pinot gris). There are now more than 200 vineyards servicing the 60 wineries. More than half of these vineyards are less than 2ha and two-thirds less than 4ha, giving a good idea of the type of place this is.

The last really poor vintage was 1996. 2003 and 2004 have provided many excellent wines and 2005 looks like doing the same. 2006 was an earlier vintage than usual but also has its supporters, while 2007, another early vintage, although too early to provide any definitive indications, was hot, and in the words of some "harsh", but is likely to provide good intensity of flavour. Lindsay McCall of Paringa, when describing recent vintage conditions, said, "normal is out the window".

I will look at three individual producers in the weeks to come but for those keen to enjoy the pinots of the Peninsula, look to wines from producers such as Kooyong, Main Ridge, Paringa Estate, Stonier, Scorpo, Paradigm Hill, Ten Minutes by Tractor, Port Phillip Estate and Yabby Lake. Prices, as one would expect for small producers making top-line pinot, are not cheap but, overall, the region provides good value.

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VINE views ... Stonier vineyard in Mornington Peninsula benefits from the maritime climate.



BEST in the house ... Stonier estate; right, its sparkling wine comes from pinot noir and chardonnay grapes.

