

MEANDERING THE YARRA

A premium wine region, recognised globally for some of the best chardonnays in the world, Yarra Valley is my stomping ground, and I am very proud of it. Which is why when Caravan World brought a content shoot to Yarra Valley, I was super excited and couldn't wait to share my passion with everyone involved.

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chardonnays how they are meant to be – complex, long lasting and fruitful.

To achieve all of these in one wine, a commonly used technique of partial oak is used. Around 30 per cent of overall chardonnay volume gets put into new oak to pick up complexity and softness, while the rest receives old oak (barrels that have been used for over five years), which doesn't give out as much flavour, preserving the grape's fruity aromas and flavours.

At the end of ageing process, the two are reunited in the bottle to produce an elegant wine with well-expressed fruit characteristics, balanced acidity and layered complexity. If there was ever a time to fall back in love with a chardonnay, it's now!

THE PERFECT PINOT

Pinot noir is a flagship variety in the valley amongst the reds. I am a little biased, but I feel the classic Yarra Valley pinot provides consumers with the best of all worlds, with the lush but delicate fruit aromas and flavours at the front, savoury and earthy on the mid palate, and a spicy finish to top it off. When you go for a pinot from a climate even just a fraction warmer, it has soaked in much more fruit-forward flavours without developing the mid palate intricacy. If you go to a cooler place than Yarra, you get a lot of punch on the mid palate with plenty of savoury notes – but not so much fruitiness on the front. For me this is why the Yarra Valley Pinot Noir is the perfect middle ground, providing layers of complexity that reveal themselves with every new sip you take.

THE BIG REDS TAMED

Traditionally known as hot climate varieties, producing bold 'in-your-face' aromas and

We all like a little bit of convenience in life, and, being less than an hour's drive from Melbourne, the Yarra Valley ticks this box for many people. Needless to say, this is why day trips to the region are so popular amongst busy city dwellers. It provides a picturesque escape to a different world, one where things slow down and you can enjoy a glass of wine whilst taking in beautiful rolling hills and breathing in the fresh Yarra Valley air.

Yarra Valley is a unique wine region for a couple of reasons. Firstly, its soil is comprised of a mixture of red and grey volcanic soils, with the hilly landscape providing good drainage and promoting great varietal intensity. This makes the Yarra Valley a good region for a vast array of vine varieties. Secondly, though deemed a cool-climate region in generic terms, Yarra Valley boasts a large diversity of sub-climates that allows producers to be creative with their planting, again adding to the range of varieties grown in the region.

CHARDY REBORN

Chardonnay lovers, you're in luck! The

flagship Yarra Valley white is on the rise in popularity once again, but this time it is better. After decades producing butterscotch, oily chardonnays your aunt used to drink, Australian producers are going back to the original European style of production, which exhibits more fruit-driven characteristics of chardonnay grape, while giving it some complexity with mild oak. So if that was the original chardonnay style, why did we change our chardonnays so much, you ask? The answer goes back a few years.

Before production was well established in Australia, most wines were brought over from Europe. The bulk were transported in barrels to save space and then bottled upon arriving. This meant the delicate whites sat in oak for months until reaching Australia, slowly losing fruity primary aromas and flavours to dominant oak characteristics. This was the wine that became the norm in Australia, and once 'culture' sets in it's very hard to change. This is possibly this is why we had such a long grab on oaky chardonnays.

Globalisation finally broke that trend over the past couple of decades. We now make



ABOVE Due to its proximity, the Yarra Valley is perfect for day trips

flavours in wine, the big-reds duo of Shiraz and Cab are far more docile in the cooler climate of Yarra Valley. That is not to say they are any less interesting – quite the opposite.

In hot climate grape ripening happens very fast, resulting in big fruit expression and a lot of natural sweetness, which translates to bold fruit-driven reds with more alcohol. The cooler climate of Yarra Valley, on the other hand results in slower ripening, allowing for more complex flavours and tannic structures to develop. You then get a delicate, lighter red that doesn't need as much ageing to show the fine characteristics of fruit mixed with savoury notes of mid palate and silky tannins.

A POINT OF DIFFERENCE

The range of sub-climates in the Yarra Valley allows premium producers to play around with alternative varieties and produce 'interesting' wines. When visiting I highly recommend trying wines you may have not heard of. Among the top on my list would be varieties such as Viognier, Marsanne, and Roussanne, which are often blended together – as well as Arnise and Chenin Blanc.

A good example of red would be Northern Italian varieties such as Nebiolo. The end of the season in Yarra Valley sees a lot of fog, which creates perfect conditions for prolonged ripening of the grapes – an absolute must for producing a good balanced Neb. [@](#)

UP TO TASTE!

2018 PIMPERNEL CHENIN BLANC – \$40

This variety never disappoints those that love navigating different aromas layers in wine. It starts floral and lifted, perhaps with a bit of fresh honey there too. But, it wouldn't be a Chenin Blanc without beautifully balanced aromas of apple, pear and melon. Subtle green apple-like acidity is there on the background every step of the way holding this wine together, layered with peach and quince flavours.

2019 BOAT O'CRAIGO BLACK SPUR CHARDONNAY – \$32

This is a definition of classic Yarra Valley Chardonnay. Primary aromas are uniquely varietal, with the winemaker's mark is not far

behind. Citrus and orange peel on the front is backed by stroke match and ginger spice. The palate displays a similar dynamic – apricots and honeysuckle come first, with creaminess and savouriness finishing the job.

2018 SOUMAH UPPER NGUMBY VINEYARD PINOT NOIR – \$40

I like Soumah for their Pinot Noirs, and they have a few. Comparing them shows broad this variety can be.

Soumah have two vineyards for Pinot – Upper Ngumby and Hexham. Upper Ngumby gets morning sun, resulting in gentler ripening unlocking the subtle, classy aromas of Pinot – lots of flowers, forest floor and cherries. Hexham receives

warmer afternoon rays, so the wine is more fruit forward and lush. I prefer the Upper Ngumby.

If you like fresh reds, this is the wine for you. Cold nights enable it to have a very attractive citrus structure. You get the cherries too, plus raspberries and fresh mushrooms.

2017 ROB DOLAN WHITE LABEL CABERNET SAUVIGNON – \$38

This wine is consistently among Australia's top Cabernets year after year. With blackcurrant, mocha, and cedar to name a few, what doesn't this have on the nose? The palate is equally as impressive – dark berries, Mediterranean spices, silky tannins.

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