

WINE

gastropubs, The Argo, for one of the Peninsula's best small winery cellar doors. The place feels like a chef's playroom – because it is: big open kitchen, wide communal tables, a wooden deck overlooking the vineyard, small plates of whatever's in season locally. It's like hanging out (couldn't resist) at your best mate's holiday house, chatting to him as Tony cooks, while Michael cracks open another bottle of bubbly – except the sparkling was made here and is disgorged to order.

Martin Spedding bought the well-established Ten Minutes by Tractor wine business just three years ago: before that, he worked in financial services, and had no background whatsoever in growing grapes, making wine or running a cellar door restaurant. He was obviously born to be a vigneron, though, because this is now one of the Peninsula's leading wineries: the wines – especially the single vineyard chardonnays – are sensational; the small but superb restaurant – winner of the current *Gourmet Traveller* Wine List of the Year Award – is one of the region's must-visit destinations; and Spedding is busily converting all his vineyards to organic viticultural practices.

Melbourne lawyer Paul Staindl has also taken up the organic challenge: soon after buying a small, 20-year-old vineyard on Red Hill in 2003 he started converting to biodynamic practices. Now he and vineyard manager Adam Irish are convinced that this has taken the vineyard up to the next level of quality. The wines are made by the legendary Phillip Jones, and they are, indeed, wonderful – particularly the riesling and pinot noir. Staindl should definitely be included on anyone's list of the Peninsula's very best boutique producers – not bad going for a late-life second career option.*
For winery details go to: www.mpva.com.au.

A vine tour
Wine aficionados will enjoy Domain Chandon's improved winemaking tour.



DECEMBER WINE NEWS

FILL YOUR STOCKING WITH WINE BOOKS

This year's biggie is *The World Atlas of Wine* (Hachette, \$79.95 hbk) by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson. I love the advice on bargain-boozing in Peter Forrestal's *Quaff 2008* (Hardie Grant, \$19.95 pbk). Sydney-based Master of Wine Rob Geddes has penned a comprehensive general reference book *A Good Nose and Great Legs* (Murdoch Books, \$39.95 pbk). Winemaking legend Ian Hickenbotham has published his autobiography, *Australian Plonky* (University of Adelaide Barr Smith Press, \$39.95 hbk). And the 25th edition of Robin Bradley's *Australian Wine Vintages* (Hunter Agencies, \$29.95 pbk, www.gold-book.com) will, he says, be his last.

THE FACEBOOK OF WINE

Billing itself as the Facebook for wine nerds, www.qwoff.com.au is a community-based site for sharing wine gossip.

OLD VINE THEORY

At present there is no legal definition of how old a vineyard has to be before you can use the phrase 'old vine' on a label – so Yalumba have gone out on a limb and proposed an Old Vine Charter: Old Vines are those over 35, Antique Vines are 70 years or older, Centenarian are more than 100 years and Tri-Centenarian Vines are those which have spanned three centuries.

TOUR OF BEAUTY

The already beautiful and informative Domaine Chandon winemaking tour has been expanded and updated. The showpiece attraction at the Yarra Valley winery now includes even more gorgeous photography and in-depth winemaking displays. The tours run daily and bookings are not required.

TOP DROPS OF THE MONTH



BARGAIN

2007 Capel Vale Debut Sauvignon Blanc Semillon, Pemberton, WA, \$16
Capel Vale has had a face-lift and the wines are better than ever. Bursting with sweet, grapey, passionfruity flavours, this classic sav sem is vibrant and friendly, finishing nice and dry. Drink with scallops.



RED

2006 Paxton Quandong Farm Shiraz, McLaren Vale, SA, \$30
This biodynamically grown shiraz has heaps of typically regional ripe red berry and chocolate flavours, but there's a brightness and juiciness that sets it apart. Get in quick because it's a limited release. Drink with chargrilled kangaroo.



WHITE

2007 Chalmers Fiano, Euston, NSW, \$22
The southern Italian grape, fiano, is proving itself to be a winner in warm Australian vineyards: this is a gorgeously floral and grapey white wine, with lovely texture and a crisp finish – like an elegant viognier. Drink with salty fried whitebait.



ONE FOR THE CELLAR

2006 Red Edge Degree Shiraz, Heathcote, Vic, \$30
Peter Dredge is making some of the best reds in Heathcote, particularly the cab and this shiraz from his older vineyard. Dense, plush fruit, but solid, imposing tannins. Give it five years at least. Drink with steak and kidney pie.



IMPORT

2005 Château Cissac, Haut-Médoc, France, \$44
Fragrant blackcurrant and violets signal a superbly elegant Bordeaux with fine, persistent tannin. Delicious now, but will cellar beautifully, too. Drink with cold roast beef sandwiches.



SPARKLING

NV Chandon Brut Rosé, Vic, \$29
A new wine from the ever-improving Chandon sparkling stable. Unlike the vintage rosé, which is always released with a little bottle age, this is a very fresh, gently fruity, fine pink fizz, best enjoyed as soon as possible. Drink with smoked salmon canapés.

Stockists p212