

NEWS

CHARDONNAY 10

I've made no secret of the fact that Australian chardonnay is exciting the hell out of me at the moment and I'm certainly not alone among those who've sampled the latest offering. I've replaced the infamous ABC club (anything but chardonnay) with the Always Buy Chardonnay initiative. Game on!

The growing excitement around chardonnay stretches across the globe, with the wines of Chablis and further south into the Côte d'Or having sharpened their edge of exhilaration in recent years. Even the New Zealanders seem to be getting their house in order.

It was therefore with bated breath that I rolled out of Melbourne to the Yarra Valley for a cosy mid-winter tasting called Chardonnay 10, hosted by Garry and Julie Hounsell. Mounted in celebration of their Toolangi project's 10th birthday, multiple tiers of chardonnay have been a key highlight of Toolangi's repertoire.

As a wine community, we've all become pretty adept at these comparative tasting events where someone or another pitches theirs against the rest, but this was faultlessly executed. The theme took Australian chardonnay solely from the Yarra Valley (where Toolangi's vineyard is located) and mixed them into a well-chosen selection from Italy, New Zealand, Chablis and the Côte d'Or.

An esteemed panel of James Halliday, Huon Hooke, Bob Campbell, Debra Meiberg and Philip Rich sat in front of the fireplace of the (somewhat ironic) Oak Room at Chateau Yering, flanked by grey and green Yarra Valley winter landscape on either side. Four long tables were lined with chardonnay makers and lovers sitting elbow to elbow.

Riedel's Vinum Montrachet stems were the perfect crystal bowls to present the day's 21 compelling chardonnays, poured with style by a fleet of Melbourne's most esteemed sommeliers. Served up and discussed in three blind-tasted brackets, the Yarra demonstrated convincing compatibility and competence in producing truly world-class chardonnay. It's capable of delivering powerfully intense, complex and layered wines without sacrificing precision or focus – essentially mimicking the hallmarks of the greatest Burgundian examples, uniquely expressed with Yarra Valley typicity.

It proved a refreshing and reassuring outcome to see that the same criteria casting the room's preferences towards the most concentrated, layered, chiseled and precise wines, no matter where they originated.

From the Yarra Valley, the tidy 2006 vintage performed every bit as well as expected via the Oakridge 864, Serrat, Coldstream Hills Reserve and Toolangi Reserve. New Zealand's Te Mata Elston, Neudorf Moutere and Felton Road Block 2 all ran mid-field and the sole Italian, Isole e Olena Collezione de Marchi IGT, had the vinous equivalent of a riderless finish.

Another great lesson came via the 2007 Bonneau du Martray Corton Charlemagne; nothing came close for sheer power and composure, delivering all that's implied by its grand cru status. Further inspiration came from Chassagne-Montrachet and Meursault via Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey, Sauzet's Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru Perrieres had impressive precision and layering, and Christian Moreau's 1er Cru Vaillons Chablis reminded all of just how entrancing the polished chalky exterior and soft-centred charms of great Chablis can truly be. Mission accomplished – the quest continues apace. **NICK STOCK**



THE WINES

- 2007 Domaine Blain-Gagnard Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru La Boudriotte
- 2007 Domaine Bonneau du Martray Corton-Charlemagne Grand Cru
- 2007 Domaine Bouchard Pere & Fils Meursault-Genevrières 1er Cru
- 2007 Domaine Christian Moreau Chablis 1er Cru Vaillon
- 2006 Coldstream Hills Reserve Chardonnay
- 2006 De Bortoli Reserve Release Chardonnay
- 2007 Domaine Etienne Sauzet Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru Les Perrieres
- 2008 Felton Road Block 2 Chardonnay
- 2006 Giant Steps Tarraford Vineyard Chardonnay
- 2007 Isole e Olena Collezione de Marchi Chardonnay IGT
- 2007 Domaine Leflaive Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru Clavoillon
- 2008 Neudorf Moutere Chardonnay
- 2006 Oakridge 864 Chardonnay
- 2007 Maison Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey Meursault AC Les Tillets
- 2007 Maison Pierre-Yves Colin-Morey Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru Baudines
- 2006 Serrat Chardonnay
- 2006 Tarrawarra Estate Reserve Chardonnay
- 2008 Te Mata Estate Elston Chardonnay
- 2006 Toolangi Vineyards Estate Chardonnay
- 2006 Toolangi Vineyards Reserve Chardonnay
- 2006 Yering Station Reserve Chardonnay



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