

## **Huon Hooke**

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### **Southern secrets**

Tasmania makes top-class pinot noir, so why don't we hear more about it?

Peter Dunbavan, the winemaker-manager of Home Hill vineyard and winery, south of Hobart, is off to visit wineries in Central Otago, New Zealand, in a few weeks thanks to the \$3,500 he received a year ago as the winner of the Winemaking Tasmania Trophy.

This is given each year to the maker of the best three-year-old pinot noir at the Tasmanian Wine Show to further the knowledge of Tasmanian vignerons about this most complex of grapes. Dunbavan's Home Hill 2003 Pinot Noir topped its vintage class, his '03 reserve also won a gold medal and a fortnight ago, in the 2007 show, both of his 2005 (reserve and regular) pinots as well as his 2004 regular pinot won gold medals. But he came away without any trophies, such is the luck of the draw.

This year's travel award winner is Barringwood Park, a tiny vineyard in the north of Tasmania near Devonport. Owners Judy and Ian Robinson seemed thrilled to have won, but they are yet to work out how they'll spend their \$3,500 prize money. Their wine, Barringwood Park Mill Block Pinot Noir 2004, was made under contract by Tamar Valley winery Tamar Ridge.

It is an act of generosity for Winemaking Tasmania (a private winery that makes wine for 45 small vineyards) to give this cash prize. But then, that's the spirit of the Tassie wine industry: co-operation and encouragement are normal. Winemaking Tasmania is a rather unglamorous but very functional big tin shed in an industrial estate near Hobart. It was set up by Julian Alcorso, a member of Moorilla Estate's founding family, a few years ago. The company doesn't compete with its clients as some contract winemaking businesses do: it doesn't have its own label or even sell any bottled wine.

### **Most of the wines never make it across Bass Strait.**

Every year for the past 17, I've judged at this show, Tasmania's regional wine show, not to be confused with the Royal Hobart Wine Show. And pinot noir has always been the most fiercely contested varietal. This year in the class under the spotlight, the outstanding 2005 vintage, there were no fewer than 88 entries. A record nine gold medals were awarded.

Tassie has long rated with me as on the best places, if not the best, in Australia for pinot noir. So why is it so little known? At the international Mornington

Peninsula Pinot Noir Celebration in a couple of weeks, only one Tasmanian pinot noir will be included, although wines from all over the world will be featured.

The reason must be that the wines are made in such small licks that most never make it across Bass Strait. Even fewer have mainland distribution. Most are sold and drunk locally. Tasmania has 1200 hectares of vines and well over 100 branded wine producers, with each producer averaging 12ha. Home Hill and Barringwood Park are tiny, with 4ha of vines each.

As with Barrinwood Park, many of the state's producers have their wine made for them, if not by Tamar Ridge or Winemaking Tasmania, then by Andrew Hood's Hood Wines or by one or two other sizeable concerns, which do a little contract work. Contract winemakers are almost always highly competent. Hence, it's almost guaranteed that wine quality will be decent at the very least, potentially great if the grapes delivered to the winery are first-rate.

### **Pooley's Week**

Matt Pooley was all smiles as he collected trophies for two wines at the Tasmanian Wines Show. His 2004 Pooley Coal River Riesling (about \$25) was accorded the people's choice award. As well, both the gold-medal museum pinots were his, Coinda Vale being the family's previous brand-name.

Pooley looks after the vineyard and is assistant winemaker, while the team at Hood Wines vinifies the wines at its contract winemaking facility. The vineyard scored the only gold medals in the museum pinot noir class, with wines made 10 years apart (1991 and 2001).

The older wine, having proved itself over 16 years (how many Australian pinots have gone that distance?) won the trophy for best museum red. The eight-hectare vineyard at Campania in the coal valley near Hobart was started by Pooley's grandmother in 1985. The Pooley Riesling style is highly fragrant, limey, very intense and vital on the palate and takes at least 10 years of age superbly - more since it's been bottled under screw cap.