



It's hats off to Larry...



by john jens

UNTIL recently, there were only six WA-made Methode Champenoise, or sparkling wines, on the market. Each was made lovingly and in tiny quantities and virtually all were released commercially in the \$25-plus price range. Most were well above that.

Things have changed and there must be a couple of dozen labels on the market now, with most aiming at a top-end price point – as you'd expect for wines made in tiny quantities and from quite expensive fruit.

Certainly expensive when compared with the purpose-grown and 'economies of scale' quantities of base material provided for the eastern states' largest specialty sparkling wine producers.

WA's sparkling wines have been 'user-friendly' and lovely drinking rather than classic cool-area styles.

It wasn't until the 2001 and 2002 Houghton-produced sparkling Pemberton pinot noir chardonnays won back-to-back gold medals and then trophies for the Best Sparkling Wine against Australia's finest at our National Wine Show in Canberra, among other awards, that the West had national wine show circuit success with this style.

The Houghton 2004 release also gained national wine show gold medals and the current 2005 release, under the "Wisdom" label, is the most widely available high-quality and reasonably-priced wine (at \$34) for this style from WA.

Add to the list the new Larry Cherubino Ad Hoc Pinot Noir Chardonnay NV sparkler at just \$19.95 that is being released this week.

Some wine makers win accolades for chardonnays, some for rieslings and some for cabernets but over the years, this guy, with his winemaking teams, has won more gold medals and trophies than anyone else in WA's history.

Larry Cherubino is producing three labels at different price points.

The most reasonably priced group is the Ad Hoc range that sells at between \$19 and \$21.50.

Three of this range were included among James Halliday's top 80 table wines of his Australian Top 100 late last year and two were included in last week's *Sydney Morning Herald's* Top 50 Wines by Huon Hooke.

His mid-price range is The Yard series that incorporates fruit off family-owned vineyards from all over WA, from whatever regions provide the best fruit for that style.

A couple of these labels are also among the best WA wines for value for money in their style and price ranges.

The Cherubino range is Larry's most upmarket label and at least a couple of these are among WA's finest and most exciting releases of the past couple of years.

James Halliday's *Australian Wine Companion 2009* lists this as one of his 10 Best New Wineries, gives five stars and, referring to all three labels, sums up "as expected, the quality is exemplary".

Though this Ad Hoc Pinot Noir Chardonnay NV has been placed in the just-under \$20 price bracket, it would be highly sought after and good value even if it was priced with the \$30-plus The Yard releases.

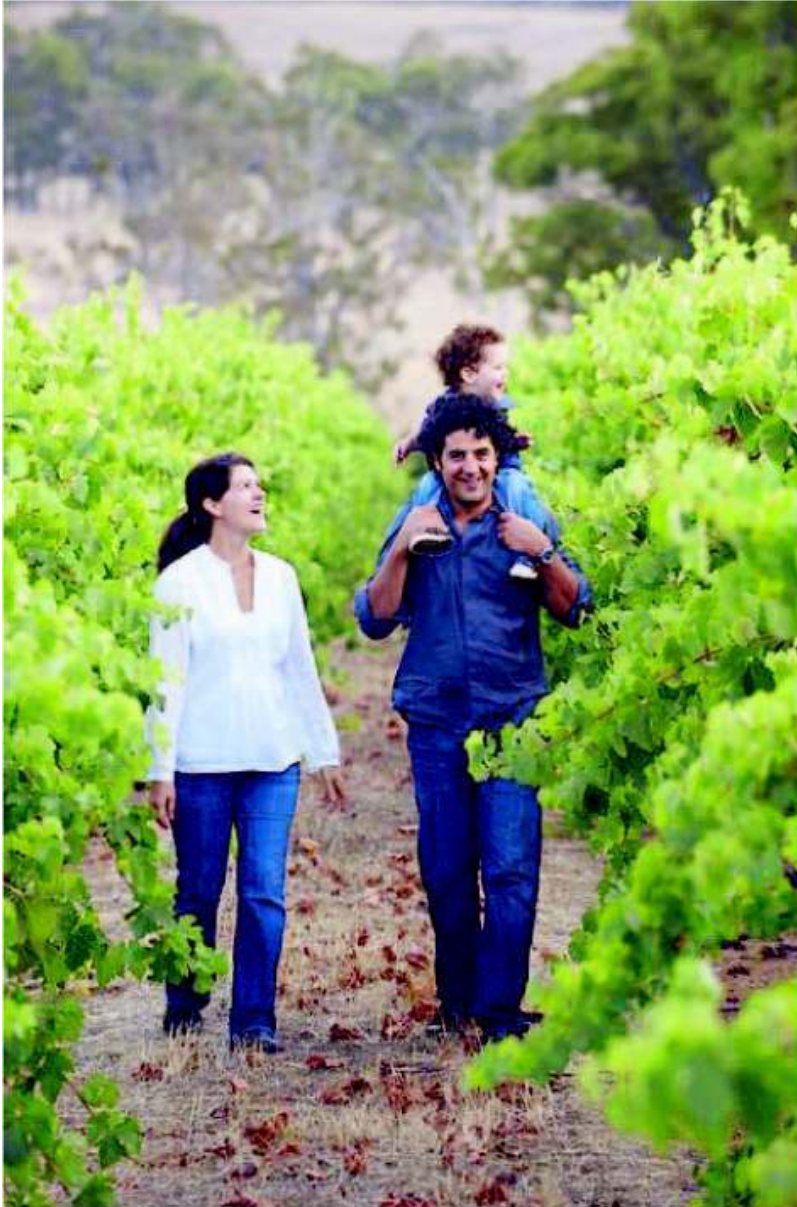
There are only 200 dozen available and at this price it is a stunner. You would have to visit the specialist wine merchants to find quantities but by the case you should be able to get it at about \$18.

In perspective, if any sparkling wine of this quality was produced interstate, from fruit of this quality (and this is from Pemberton) by another winemaker of Larry Cherubino's proven track record and imagery, the starting price at cellar door, and surely that's where it all would be sold, would be at least \$35 and probably more than \$40.

This first release of the Ad Hoc Pinot Noir Chardonnay is clearly not Krug and it is not even of Louis Roederer or Pol Roger quality among the great and marvellous value French champagnes, but it is one-17th of the price of the former and just one-fifth of the price of the latter two.

This wine has no 'nervous' corners or edges and it provides a young but complete, complex and balanced mouthful of wonderfully textured flavours – and especially for a sparkling wine in this price range.

It drinks wonderfully now and will be even better in six to 12 months, or perhaps even 24. Call 0416 100 971 to track down your local stockist. 18 points and RRP \$19.95



Above: Edwian, Ilario and Larry Cherubino in Frankland River. Top right: Cherubino Cabernet Sauvignon. Bottom right: Larry Cherubino.