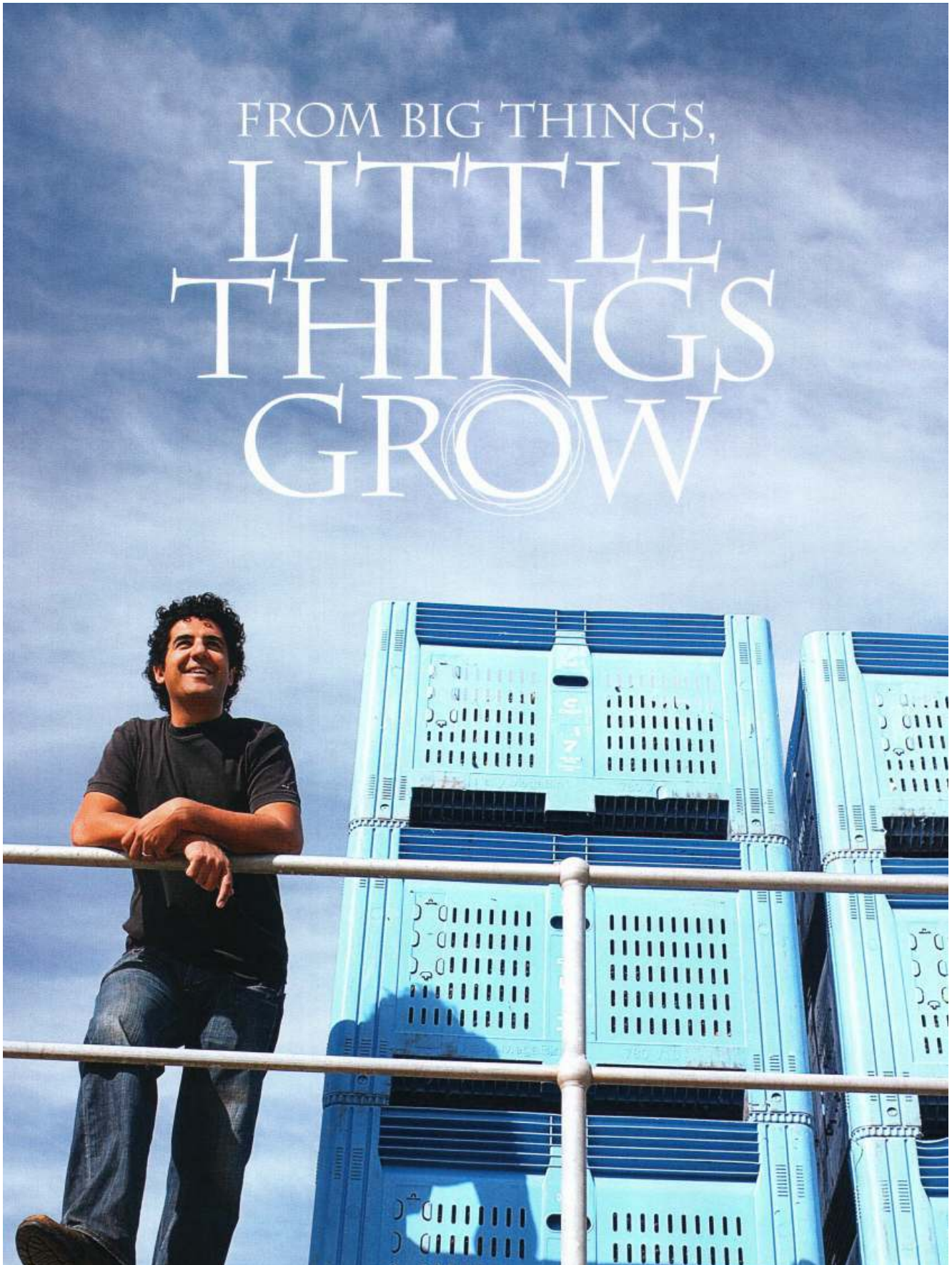




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## WINEMAKER PROFILE

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After several years working as a corporate winemaker travelling the globe, Larry Cherubino has put down roots and channelled his energy into a family operation based in his “wine heartland”, Western Australia.

There are some things about the Larry Cherubino story that appear all too familiar. For a start, he is very much a man of the times. In an age when the philosophical discussion and much of the energy of the Australian wine industry is focused on proving that we can, and do, make more than consistently good, well-priced, commercial wines for the world market, he is in the early stages of developing a family business aimed at producing distinctive wines that clearly show regional characters.

Cherubino, too, is one of an increasing number of successful, high-profile, large-company winemakers who have chosen to reinvent themselves away from the corporate world in small family operations: people like Robin Day, John Duval, David Hohnen, Don Lewis, Philip Shaw, Steve Pannell and, more recently, Bill Downie. What sets Cherubino and Pannell apart is that, in their 30s, they turned their back on the corporate life (large-scale winemaking and substantial chunks of time spent marketing wines around the world) in favour of more hands-on work.

There is, however, much about the Larry Cherubino story that is unique. At its heart is a mercurial, energetic, restless, fastidious individual in perpetual motion. He is a perfectionist who understands the importance of the vineyard and can work with viticultur-

ists to get the best out of a site. As well as this, he has a sure grasp of the technicalities of winemaking and the artistic sensibility to finesse and finish a wine.

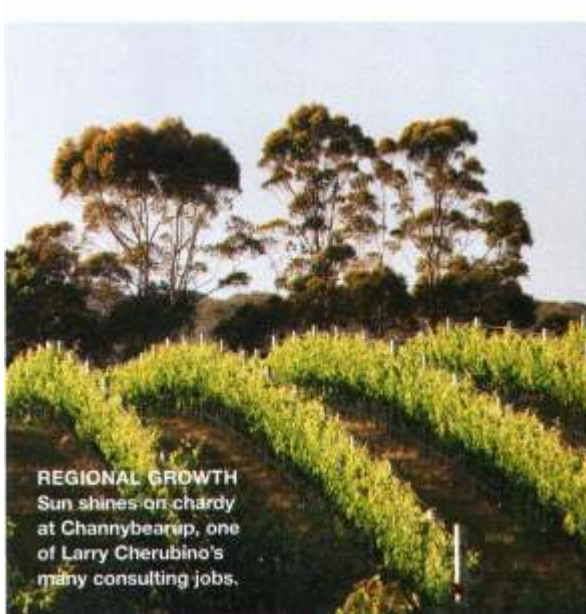
One thing is key to Cherubino's drive. When asked about his new enterprises, he replies: “It's about the family.” His parents were from Calabria in Italy, although they met in Western Australia in 1949. Cherubino was born in the outer Perth suburb of Keysbrook, where his parents had a dairy farm, before they moved to a vineyard in the Swan Valley. His extended family is still based in the Swan, while the family of his wife, Edwina Egerton-Warburton, farm in Frankland River. Their son, Ilario, two, is like a clone of his father, and building for his future is a driving force of the Cherubino enterprises.

The key to Cherubino's success would appear to lie in the work he did as senior winemaker for Western Australia's largest wine company, Houghton, from 1998 to 2003. His appointment at the age of 28, after the company's two most senior winemakers resigned just before the 1999 vintage, ensured that his debut vintage would be difficult to forget. On his watch, the quality of Houghton's quaffing wines improved, and the introduction of varietals from regional Western Australia gave the company a focus in that area that it had lacked. The Gladstones Shiraz (from

Frankland River) and Gladstones Cabernet Sauvignon (from Margaret River) and refinements to the single-vineyard flagship Jack Mann Cabernet strengthened the Houghton portfolio at the ultra-premium end.

Arguably the two most highly regarded large-company winemakers working in WA in the early 2000s were Cherubino and Mike Kerrigan (then of Howard Park). One of the factors that contributed to the respect in which each was held was the thousands of kilometres they travelled each year checking on the vineyards that contributed to their crush. The knowledge gained during this time has enabled Cherubino to source grapes from different West Australian regions knowing that he can match an ideal site to the appropriate grape variety.

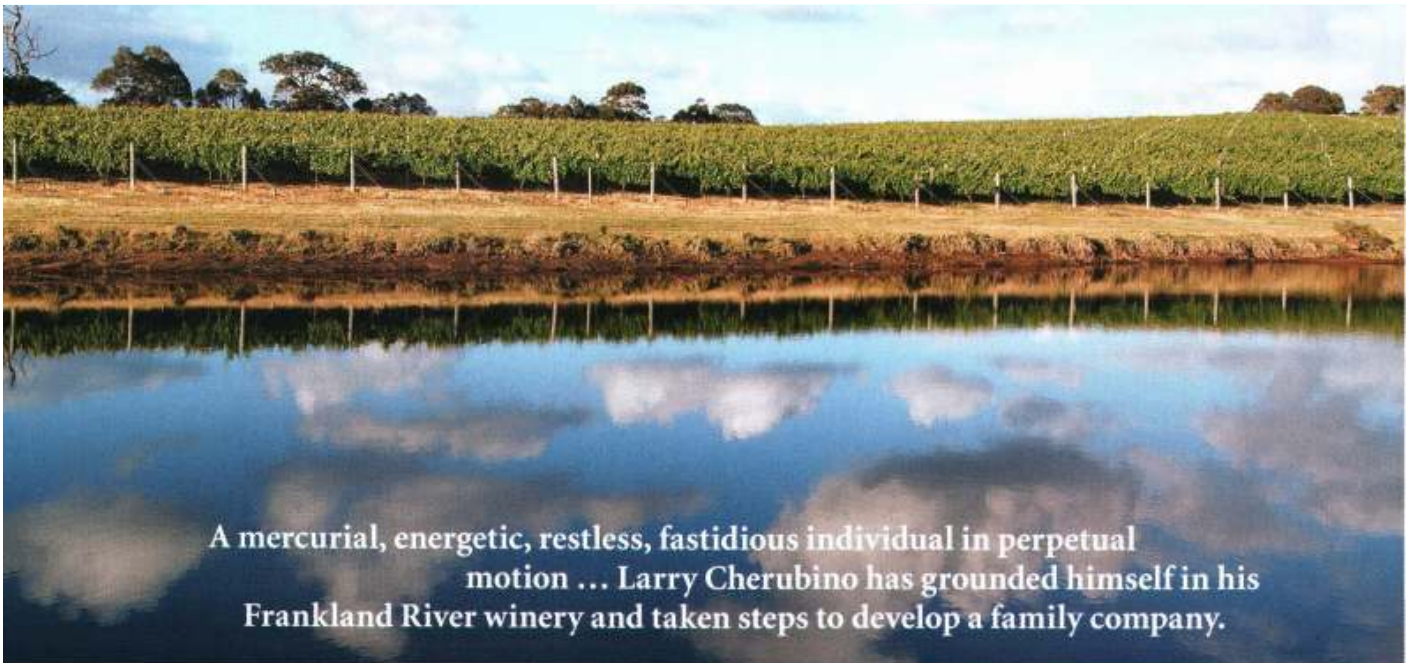
The first three years after Houghton saw Cherubino throw himself into his newly formed consultancy business, taking up the role of consultant winemaker at Settesoli and Planeta in Sicily; doing the vintage and touring Friuli, Piedmont and Modena; consulting to Mount Rozier at Stellenbosch in South Africa; beginning his relationship with Staglin Family Vineyard in the Napa; and consulting to Blake Family Vineyard and Alluviale in Hawkes Bay. After the death of Craggy Range's American-born winemaker, Doug



**REGIONAL GROWTH**  
Sun shines on chardy  
at Channybearup, one  
of Larry Cherubino's  
many consulting jobs.

Wisor, in October 2004, Cherubino stepped in as senior winemaker with responsibility for Gimblett Gravels reds and chardonnay for the 2005 vintage. Cherubino also consulted to several West Australian vineyards and wineries including Forest Hill (Great Southern), Peos Estate (Manjimup), Channybearup (Pemberton), Gibraltar Rock (Porongurup) and Wignalls (Albany).

Much was achieved during these three years, and his reputation and profile were enhanced. The number of prominent wineries that continue to enlist his services is evidence of this. Contacts he made during this time



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play a vital part in distributing the wines of his family company, including former Vincer chief executive Rich Hanen in the US. Cherubino adds that he learned a great deal from his experiences in the US. This can be seen in the state-of-the-art sorting tables and grape-handling equipment that has been installed at John Edwards' The Lane in the Adelaide Hills. Less tangible has been his experience with sizeable US wineries, where he has been working to find the right balance between hands-on and automated winemaking, and his search for more restraint in the oak treatment of his reds to maximise fruit expression.

Working overseas has given Cherubino the opportunity to see some "fantastic" clonal material in Italy, New Zealand and the US which has attributes such as high colour or softer tannins or produces grapes with the ability to accumulate tannins slowly. As a result, he has collaborated with viticulturist Neil Delroy to source and import 60 new propriety clones, especially of merlot, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc.

The frenetic pace of those years and the demands of travel must have taken their toll, even for someone with Cherubino's tremendous energy. Since 2005 he has grounded himself more in Western Australia, his "wine heartland", and taken steps to develop a family company.

At the centre of his plans has been the family property of his wife at Frankland River. The 85-hectare Acacia Ridge vineyard was planted in 1998 and 1999 to riesling, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, cabernet and shiraz on the farm where her father, David, lives and which the Egerton-Warburtons have farmed since 1853. Winery space is rented at Wise at Yallingup in the northern reaches of Margaret River, and processing also takes place at Mount Shadforth just outside Denmark.

The pinnacle of the company's production are the best wines that Cherubino can make, and these bear the family name. Volumes are low – at present about 300 to 500 cases a year – and mostly they are single-vineyard wines. They do, however, always showcase the finest varietal expression of a particular locality. There are 100 cases of a **2007 Cherubino Mount Barker**

**Riesling** (A\$35) from the Whispering Hill vineyard: restrained, delicate and subtle, zesty lemony cream before slaty mineral characters linger on a gentle, ultra-fine finish. It's tightly structured, viscous and seamless, and given some mid-palate softness by a touch of residual sugar which is not evident on its crisp, fresh finish.

There's a **2007 Cherubino Pemberton Sauvignon Blanc** (A\$35) from the excellent

Channybearup vineyard, which is fermented and given five months in new French oak without showing any evidence of overt cedary characters in its restrained, subtle, fine palate. There are cool, tangy flavours, tremendous purity and zingy acidity that cleanses and refreshes. There are 75 dozen of a **2006 Cherubino Shiraz** (to be released in March) from the Acacia Ridge vineyard at Frankland River. It has deep brooding aromas, is opulent and ultra-concentrated with brambly, briary characters, velvety texture and fine, ripe tannins. It will fit comfortably alongside the best shiraz made in Western Australia. The final part to the puzzle will be the **2007 Cherubino Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon** sourced from a leased, dry-grown vineyard in Wilyabrup with a small amount from further north at Yallingup. It is due for release in March 2009.

The Yard is a range of single-vineyard wines that are now sourced from family-owned properties. About 1500 cases are marketed at between A\$27 and A\$35 a bottle. The first release was the impressive **2005 The Yard Shiraz** from the Powderbark Vineyard at Frankland River, showing good weight, power and concentration, vanilla bean, blackcurrant jube and chocolate flavours. With the **2006 The Yard Shiraz** (to be released soon), the fruit source has moved to the Egerton-Warburton Acacia Ridge





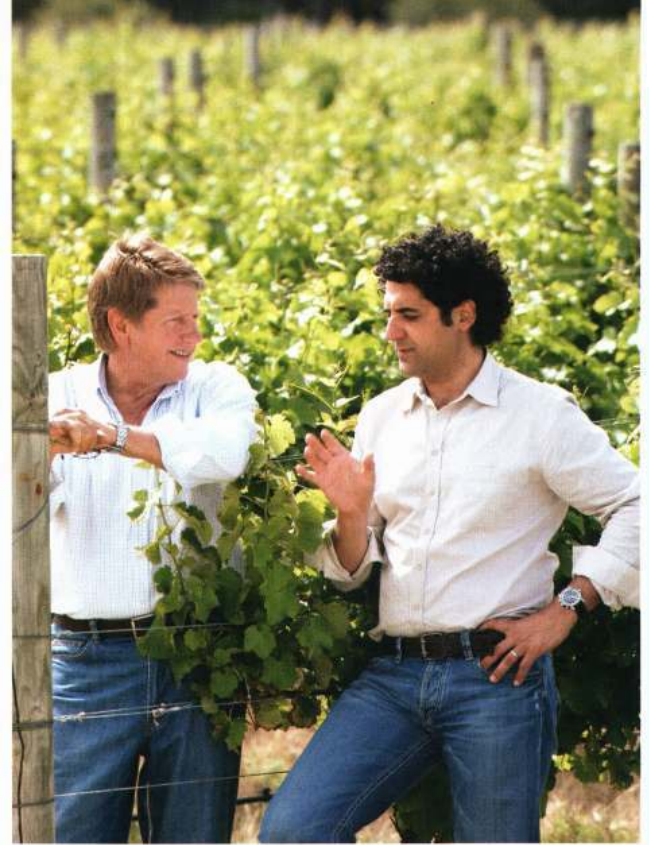
Vineyard. As a barrel sample, it looked finer, tighter and more elegant than the 2005 red, with more restrained oak treatment.

The first white in the range is the **2007 The Yard Whispering Hill Vineyard Riesling** (A\$27) from the Pratten family's Mount Barker property. This is a brilliant white; beguilingly floral, it zings and dances across the palate, a veritable ballerina on steroids with intense limy flavours, soft in the mid-palate yet with bracing, taut, racy acidity that remains beautifully balanced. A delightful contrast and much less subtle than the Cherubino riesling from the same vineyard, but admirably drinkable. The other white is the **2007 The Yard Pedestal Vineyard Semillon Sauvignon Blanc** (A\$27). This is sourced from Greg Brindle's home property close to Woodlands in Wilyabrup. Like Woodlands, it is a south-facing slope, although it has less vigorous soil. One-third of the wine was fermented and aged in new French oak for four months, the rest in stainless steel. There is evident, though subtle, cedary oak character, heaps of fresh, zesty, green bean and sugar snap pea flavours, vibrance and succulence, and gently herby notes on a bone-dry finish.

And then there's Ad Hoc, Cherubino's entry-level range: "Having three labels gives us the flexibility to move our resources around. Ad Hoc enables us to swallow up any grapes that are surplus to requirements for the top two labels." The 2000-case range focuses on Cherubino's perception of Western Australia's regional strengths: with releases of riesling from Mount Barker, Pemberton chardonnay, semillon sauvignon blanc from Margaret River and shiraz from Frankland River. A Margaret River cabernet sauvignon will be added to the collection in March.

The 2006 vintage was very good for Whispering Hill and Mount Barker riesling, and so the **2006 Ad Hoc Wallflower Riesling** is a serious white for the price (A\$17): fresh, clean and vibrant with lemony citrus and apple flavours, before a crisp, dry, balanced finish. **2007 Ad Hoc Straw Man Sauvignon Blanc Semillon** (A\$19) is sourced from the Pedestal Vineyard at Wilyabrup, a southerly location in the

**EVERYTHING'S VINE**  
In Pedestal Vineyard (also facing page), Cherubino and Greg Brindle check the grapes destined for The Yard sem sav.



region. Ten per cent of the blend is fermented in new French oak, while the stainless-steel component is given skin contact time and high solids to add complexity and texture. It has vibrant passionfruit and white stone-fruit flavours, reasonable weight and viscosity and a bright, zesty, dry finish. The **2005 Ad Hoc Hen & Chicken Chardonnay** (A\$22) is sourced from the Channybearup Vineyard at

Pemberton. It has cool, melon flavours with some cedary notes, is tight and fine with cleansing gentle acidity. The **2005 Ad Hoc Middle of Everywhere Shiraz** (A\$22) from Acacia Ridge is fragrant, soft, round and surprisingly cuddly; the fruit has integrated neatly with the restrained oak, and the tannins are fine and approachable. The Ad Hoc collection is ideally suited to the restaurant market at which it's targeted.

The packaging of the wines is brilliant, with the labelling of Cherubino and The Yard wines being particularly stylish. The wines appear to have won widespread acceptance among sommeliers. I have

some problems with the cumbersome nomenclature, especially of the Ad Hoc range. Those labels involve great in-jokes and eye-catching labels. Given the quality of the wines, that'll probably be enough.

Cherubino believes the introduction of new clonal material will give his wines an edge in quality. He also believes the use of sorting tables, and the painstaking, labour-intensive work associated with them, will enhance quality. The strength of the label is Cherubino's personality and talent, together with the vineyard resources he is able to work with. The brand may grow with the introduction of new resources – such as the family vineyard at Kalgan River that is a proven producer of quality riesling – but the volumes will remain low and the wines distinctive – small-scale winemaking at its best.

The move from large corporate to family business clearly suits Cherubino. "In setting up the three labels, Edwina and I have drawn on all the marketing ideas we've had for the last 10 years," he says. "I'm enjoying what I'm doing now; it's scary but fulfilling."

