



HUON HOOKE
WINE

Raise a glass to a great '08

It has been a ripper of a year for wine drinkers as local quality keeps improving.

IT WAS a very good year for wine. Not a great year if you were an exporter when the dollar started the year too high, nor an importer after the dollar plunged. Producers too probably had their problems but a minority also had an excellent year.

But for wine drinkers it was a ripper. Despite droughts, heat, bushfires, frosts and other vicissitudes, the quality of Australian wine defies belief and just keeps getting better. And on the imported front, the choice grows ever wider.

Best new brand

There are new brands and new wineries every year but the most impressive new brand in 2008 was Houghton's Wisdom range (right). I dislike the label and the name is a bit strange (it has some relation to the late sage of Houghton, Jack Mann) but the wines, presided over by winemakers Rob Bowen and Ross Pamment, are terrific.

The '07 Pemberton chardonnay (\$32) is the stand-out, starting the year with a bang by winning the Bert Bear Trophy for the best young white wine at the Sydney Royal Wine Show in February. It's a tremendously refined, intense, long-flavoured wine with subtle cashew, oatmeal and hazelnut aromas and great palate finesse. The Wisdom brand is a repackaging of what used to be known as Houghton's regional varietal range. The Pemberton



sauvignon blanc, riesling (both \$28.50), Margaret River cabernet and sparkling wine (both \$32) are all rippers.

Most improved winery

Still in Western Australia, former Houghton winemaker Larry Cherubino is doing great things with his new label of the same name. This is especially so in white wines and don't overlook his two outstanding sauvignon blancs. Mike Kerrigan has injected fresh interest and quality into Hay Shed Hill, while down at