

Winery of the year

Larry Cherubino Wines

One of the many reasons why I ended up selecting Larry Cherubino Wines as my Winery of the Year (there were over 30 others with a plausible claim) was its focus on

single-vineyard and single-region wines. It is a path that more and more Australian wine producers must follow if we are to fundamentally change the negative perceptions of domestic and (most significantly) export markets about the diversity, the quality and the style of our wines, and of our aspirations for the future.

Larry is careful not to criticise Houghton, Western Australia's leading winery (and part of Constellation Wines Australia), where he worked until 2005, but accurately observes that many exceptionally good but small batches of grapes (and potentially wine) get lost in the maw of the management and financial protocols of the big wineries.

Since founding his eponymous wine business in 2005 (after leaving Houghton), Larry's day job (as he calls it) has been that of a consultant in the broader sense, and winemaker (for others) in the narrower sense. This, he says, allows him the luxury of making small batches of exquisite (my word, not his) wines under the Larry Cherubino label.

From 2007 onwards he has made these wines at Wise Wine in Margaret River where he is consultant winemaker, variously bringing to the Wise winery juice (for riesling, semillon and sauvignon blanc), grapes (for chardonnay) and grapes or must (for shiraz, merlot and cabernet sauvignon) using his own fermenters and barrels.

Part of his intake comes from 12 ha under long-term lease, part from 8 ha of family vineyards, both in the Margaret River. He is adamant that he is not interested in growth; quality is the paramount objective. His strike-rate is 11 wines at 94 to 97 points (five special value) and another 11 at 90 to 93 points (six special value) and a solitary wine at 89 points.

No other winery had such a percentage success rate. Is there a reason? Yes, for whether the wines are Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Merlot, all have balance, line, length and, above all else, elegance. If this were not enough, every one of those varietal styles has at least one wine at 94 points or above.

