



Age

Tuesday 25/1/2011

Page: 16

Section: Epicure

Region: Melbourne Circulation: 190,100

Type: Capital City Daily

Size: 648.76 sq.cms.

Frequency: MTWTFSS-

Brief: YRDWINE(P)

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# Here's to great Aussie bottlers

Jeni Port toasts some true-blue achievers who tickled our patriotic palate in the past year.

**H**ERE'S an Australia Day honours list with a difference, recognising the special contribution made by our wines and the people behind them. And while we're throwing half a lamb on the barbie tomorrow, why not load the fridge with Australian sauvignon blanc (now there's a novelty) and stock up on some you-beaut ocker shiraz. Nothing encapsulates Australia Day more succinctly than a sunburnt barbecue cook, charcoal meat and a glass of hot red. Enjoy.

## Companions of the Order of Australian Wine (AWC)

Our greatest honours, awarded for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree, go to:

■ **For services to the advancement of Australian wine (and common sense): Foster's Wines.**

Australia's biggest winemaker placed historic Baileys of Glenrowan on the market but then saw the error of its ways and withdrew the offer late last year, leaving the north-east winery free to enjoy its 140th anniversary celebrations. Australian wine isn't just about the bottom line, it's about the dirt and the people who work it; it's about bricks and mortar and, importantly, history. Foster's is to be congratulated for being a good corporate citizen.

■ **For services to riesling: John Vickery.**

Named Australia's greatest living winemaker in a 2003 poll by *The Age*, John Vickery is a genius of the industry. During the 1960s and '70s at Leo Buring, he fashioned white-label reserve-bin DW rieslings that proved Australian riesling could be delicate and charming — even elegant. Time in bottle only enhanced their beauty, as the 1975 DW E17 Eden Valley proves. Vickery has shaped and defined the best Australian riesling, inspired young winemakers and set the ground rules for the most exacting standards. He retired last year.

■ **For services to Australian wine: Tim Adams, winemaker.**

You're just starting out in wine and

you land a cellar-rat job with one of the great Australian winemakers and gentlemen, Mick Knappstein. It's 1975. The winery is the (already) historic Leasingham in Clare. Fast forward to 2010. Leasingham is no more, closed by Constellation Wines and in disrepair. The former cellar rat buys it and announces plans for a new wine range, Mr Mick's. Happy ending. Take a bow, Tim Adams.

## Officers of the Order of Australian Wine (AWO)

Awards for outstanding achievement and service go to:

■ **For services to true-blue ocker winemaking: Dave Powell, winemaker, Torbreck Wines.**

The guy is one of Australia's best winemakers but has quite the mouth on him! He tells it like it is and then some. Last year, when asked about the move away from high-alcohol wines, he turned like a cut snake:

"I'm so f--ing sick of it. To arbitrarily say we want a wine at 14 per cent alcohol is ridiculous. I don't find out what alcohols my wines are until we do the test for the bottle label. It can be three years after a wine is made before I find out what the sugar levels are. I couldn't care less." Dave Powell gets my vote for Australia Day wine ambassador!

■ **For services to the little Aussie battler: Mark McKenzie, chief executive of Murray Valley Winegrowers.**

Big companies are hurting so they hurt the little guy — the wine grower. Standing up for the growers and their rights is Mark McKenzie. Formerly of Wine Grape Growers Australia, McKenzie decided last year to work with Murray Valley growers at the "coalface". Sadly, his job now constitutes overseeing the exit of thousands of growers from the industry and ensuring they can leave with dignity intact.

■ **For services to Aussie indomitability: Graeme and Cameron Leith, winemakers, Passing Clouds.**

The father-and-son winemaking team at Passing Clouds saw their dry-grown Kingower vineyard slowly

dying, with each vintage producing less and less of their award-winning shiraz due to climate change. Faced with the need to adapt or perish, they adapted. They are now growers of cool-climate chardonnay and pinot noir at Musk, outside Daylesford. The two men view their mid-career change as just one of the many challenges faced by the modern Australian winemaker.

## Member of the Order of Australian Wine (AWM)

For services in a particular locality or field of activity, the gongs go to:

■ **For services to the Hunter Valley: Bruce Tyrrell, winemaker, Tyrrell's Wines.**

His late father, Murray, was proclaimed "the mouth of the Hunter". Not Bruce — he's the soul of the Hunter ("the old boot" maybe), the one watching its back, protecting its history, fiercely defending the region, its wines and winemakers. He doesn't mind taking the mickey either, as the latest series of Tyrrell's advertising in bus shelters across Melbourne shows: "You can take this one anywhere. Me, on the other hand . . ." If there's one man who may yet melt the anti-Hunter resolve of Victorian taste buds, it's Bruce.

■ **For services to wine porn: Moorilla Estate, Tasmania.**

Bare breasts, writhing bodies, suggestive poses . . . Moorilla lost all control with its Praxis Series of wine

labels. "Wine is not just for drinking. The experience of wine is an experience of controlled licentiousness. Every bottle of Moorilla recapitulates the history of ritualistic indulgence, now both within and without." Quick, someone pass the smelling salts . . .

■ **For services to truth in wine labelling: Ad Hoc, Frankland River.**

Ad Hoc calls it as it is with its Middle of Everywhere 2009 Frankland River Shiraz. "Shiraz from the middle of everywhere." Ever been to Frankland River? Enough said.

## Medal of the Order of

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## Australian Wine (AWOM)

For services worthy of particular recognition, we salute:

■ For services to the wine label: Kevin Bell, winemaker.

Winemakers pay homage to all kinds of things on the backs of wine labels but Kevin Bell revealed his inner

geek with the release of his Hurley Vineyard Garamond 2008 pinot noir. The label was dedicated to Claude Garamond, the French Renaissance artisan "who created for the world the elegant font on our label".

■ For services to the Gen Y wine drinker: Brad Wehr, winemaker.

Wine By Brad combines comic-strip

frivolity with sound winemaking. Not sure what his "serious" winemaking colleagues in Margaret River reckon but we salute Wehr for pioneering Gen Y wines. If you don't get the wines or their labels, don't worry, you weren't meant to.



Clockwise from left: Riesling master John Vickery has retired; Torbreck's Dave Powell sometimes accompanies his drops with invective; Cameron Leith and father Graeme change course; Hunter legend Bruce Tyrrell. PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS

