

# Hunter Valley shows its subtle side

Joelle Thomson pulls back the bold red jungle canopy to expose some of the delicate white secrets of Australia's best-loved wine region

“ With so much noise about the deluge of blockbusting, often high-alcohol shirazes and incredibly low-priced chardonnays being launched on to the wine market here from Australia, it is a big challenge trying to get something more subtle to be noticed.

That something more subtle is semillon and softer, earthier than usual Australian shiraz, from **Hunter Valley winemaker Andrew Margan**.

The biggest selling point of Margan's wines is that they are food friendly, as their distribution attests to. These wines sell in New Zealand in a less than traditional fashion, with most of them available in restaurants and only about 30 per cent of the Margan wines allocated to New Zealand selling at specialist wine stores. This is exactly as Margan wants it to be; claiming his wines are made to drink with food.

The wines he produces from the Hunter Valley work well with food because they are light to medium bodied rather than the big, muscle-bound, oaky creatures that win most medals in wine

competitions and get the biggest accolades outside these forums.

His whites verge on idiosyncratic, particularly the crisp fresh semillon and the aromatic verdelho. Both of these wines appear to be light when first tasted before revealing their lingering flavours.

In contrast to these minerally whites, the Margan reds are relatively bold creations, but stylistically different to many Australian red wines.

One thing the Margan reds have in common with most reds from Australia is that they all contain 14 per cent alcohol. Since the Hunter Valley is markedly hotter and has a shorter grape growing season than South Australia, there is a speedier formation of flavour and tannins in the red grapes, which is responsible for these flavours in the reds.

Margan is the former marketing manager, winemaker and viticulturist at Hunter Valley's most famous family-owned winery., Tyrrells, and began his own winery with his wife Lisa, in 1997. Not that he is drawing on young vines for most of his production at

Margan Family Winegrowers. Most of the grapes he makes wine from are owned by him with their roots going back to the early 1970s, when they were planted by Lindemans Wines.

Like most Hunter Valley winemakers, Margan is not harvesting large quantities from these vineyards. His average yield each year is one to two tonnes of grapes from each acre and this ungreedy approach produces wines with noticeably intense flavours. Most surprisingly, they all cost less than \$20 a bottle, which makes them dirt cheap considering their uniformly high quality.

Margan says that Hunter Valley winemakers are on the threshold of mass marketing their light, fresh white wines to the world.

Let's hope that happens sooner rather than later. What with all the noise about the relentless tirade of big, buttery, over-the-top whites and oaky reds around at less than \$20, these are ground-breaking wines.

Joelle Thomson, *New Zealand Herald*, Wednesday, July 28, 2004.

## TROPICAL FLAVOURS

### 2003 Margan Family Semillon

“This new semillon comes from the 2003 drought vintage in the Hunter Valley which means it has more upfront, tropical fruit flavours than many Hunter Valley semillons. Its taste is in keeping with the fresh, slightly austere style that is Hunter semillon but its acids are relatively soft and the wine has an appealing rounded, medium-bodied style. It is clean, citrusy and tastes like it was made to drink with calamari, mussels or whatever fresh seafood takes your fancy. Buy it by the caseload. It will age well, but probably for the medium rather than the long haul...”



## FOOD FRIENDLY

### 2003 Margan Family Verdelho

“If you are looking for something white, dry and weighty that is not pinot gris, try this slightly salty, incredibly food-friendly verdelho from the Hunter Valley. It sells like hot cakes in Sydney restaurants. Verdelho is the famous Madeira grape but now that the Australian wine industry has moved beyond using it solely for fortified lookalikes, adventurous winemakers are producing bone-dry whites, like this one. In flavour and style, this verdelho combines the best characters of viognier's spicy taste and pinot gris' aromatic flavours. I like this highly drinkable wine a lot...”



## CELLAR PALATE

### 2002 Margan Family Shiraz

“It is rare that wines under \$20 make the grade as worthy cellaring propositions, but this weighty Hunter Valley shiraz has what it takes to improve markedly with time in the bottle. Like most Hunter shirazes, it is different in style and flavour from most Australian shirazes. Instead of sweet plum jam flavours, this medium to full-bodied red is chock full of spicy black pepper aromas and soft fruit tastes. The eight months if spent in old oak has added a smoky life. In five years it will taste more interesting than it does now and in 10 years, it will encapsulate what good old Hunter shiraz is all about...”

