

Great Southern

Plantagenet's Wyjup vineyard shows why the region is so cool



Dr Rob Lethbridge

I have three strong memories of the first trip I took to the Great Southern with my (now) wife.

One is watching the bright blue splendid fairy-wrens hop around the garden outside the shack I'd rented. The second was getting more sunburnt than I've ever been before, or since, while picking raspberries.

And the third was "discovering" the beautiful citrus and slate that characterises a Great Southern Riesling.

Since that time, my love for the region has exploded, and I think that it – and the neighbouring cool-climate Frankland River region – are producing some of the most exciting wines in the state, both red and white.

I sat down with Tom Wisdom from Plantagenet Wines, the oldest commercial winery in the region dating back to 1968. Tom points out that unlike the Margaret River wine region, 'founded' by doctors, the Great Southern was – and still is – agricultural. Whether it's that influence or simply the distance from Perth, there remains a purity and ruggedness to the region which I sometimes fear is being shaved away from along Caves Road as the decades march on.

The climate is cool and, while warming seems inevitable, Tom is optimistic that the influence of Antarctica will protect them more than their Indian-Ocean-adjacent colleagues. This cool climate and plentiful sunshine provides incredible conditions for both white and red varieties. And on a beautiful spring day, outside his historical family building (with museum!) in Fremantle, I had the pleasure of tasting their Wyjup (pronounced why-jup) range.

The Wyjup Vineyard, planted in 1971 around 40km southwest of Mount Barker, represents their premium collection of bottles across Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet, Pinot, Shiraz and Malbec. Tom tells me one strength of the Wyjup site is consistency, with the light falling evenly across the vines which sit atop a deep gravel loam. The 50-year-old vines are now mature and low-yielding, but with deep roots and minimal irrigation. This combination allows good intensity of fruit even in difficult years, and each vintage uniquely tells its story of time and place.

The entire range is both delicious and in short supply, with the individually numbered bottles being a nice touch – appealing to the most problematic parts of my vinous FOMO. Plantagenet's winemaker, Mark Garland, says he prioritises

'complexity' and that absolutely comes through with layered varietal characters expressed across the range. There's a real thoughtfulness to the construction of the wines, all with impressive texture and a palate which evolves through the tasting. Exciting wines to keep coming back to and explore.

So, whenever I worry that 'Margs' might be getting a little too corporate, I'm heartened that the Great Southern is just around the corner being slightly wilder, cooler and (I think) more exciting; with Plantagenet's Wyjup Collection emblematic of the excellent wine the region can produce. I just hope that in years to come there are still cellar doors where grizzled guys in big hats hop out of a tractor to do the tastings.

Wyjup Riesling (2024)

Only 780 bottles made

From the (literally) scorchingly hot 2024 vintage, yield was down with the sun-facing grapes singed and sultana-d, luckily protecting enough of their friends to create a deliciously saline wine with hints of oyster-shell, jasmine rice, zesty lemons and crisp green apple.



Wyjup Pinot (2023)

1,520 bottles made

The wine Tom is most proud of from the current releases – this comes from the cooler 2023 vintage. It is a brilliant crimson colour, showing bright strawberries and cherries developing to some subtle savoury mushrooms with time.



Note: Plantagenet Wines is a sponsor of the AMA (WA), and while I stand by my comments as independent and genuine, I'm also aware of the research into the impact of pharmaceutical sponsorship on prescribing practices, so keep that in mind. ■