

## On the SHIRAZ front this month

Alexandra Bridge Margaret River Shiraz 2001 (\$25): Not overly complex with easy – though stylish – redcurrant and coffee aromas/flavours on a medium weight palate that carries some sweetness, a swingingly bright, fruity finish, and completely unobtrusive, soft tannins. Composed and assured. Drink: Now-2005. 88 points.

Baileys of Glenrowan 1920s Block Shiraz 2000 (\$27): It's a super fruit-and-oak sweet wine but all things considered it lacks exclamation on the finish – it's like an unfinished sentence. Jammed with sweet blackberry fruit and lacquered with well-applied cosmetic oak, there's bright raspberry here too and dimples of iodine. I like it. I could easily drink it. But in the end it's a good body with a face you'd rather not look at. Drink: Now-2006. 86 points.

Bellarine Estate Shiraz 2000 (\$25): I liked this wine so much that I went out and bought a bottle for my dinner – and the damn thing was corked. The wine I tasted at the winery though was a real surprise packet – it was plush and bright and trying desperately to look voluptuous, with layers of chilli, soy, musk, blackberry and red berry flavour. It was savoury, it was persistent, it was elegant and gentle but promised a raunchy time after dark, and fluttered its eyelashes with well-melded tannins. I liked it a lot. Drink: Now-2007. 90 points.

Brini McLaren Vale Sebastian Shiraz 2000 (\$35): Not your average first release. Made from vines planted to the north of Blewitt Springs in 1947 (the grapes have previously made their way into labels like Penfolds Bin 389 and Rosemount Balmoral), it shows oodles of the kind of plush, plump, blackberry and plum and chocolate flavours typical of the region's best wines. This one has a smokiness to it too and a ripe stalkiness – which creeps into a slightly resinous astringency on the finish. A very good, settled wine that will age well. Drink: 2003-2010. 92 points.

Brookland Valley Verse 1 Shiraz 2001 (\$19): Beautiful value wine – fruit-full, expressive, bursting to impress. It's all plum and blackcurrant with significant sweetness in the mouth and a dry, tangy finish – I wouldn't cellar it, but as a red to get stuck into, this is the one. Drink: Now-2004. 88 points.

Hillstowe Mary's Hundred McLaren Vale Shiraz 1999 (\$45): Available around the traps on heavy discount and oh what a mighty bargain it is. Exploding with fresh-ground coffee scents, it guns blackberry, blackcurrant, soy and coffee through the mouth with serious conviction. There's ample acid, terrific balance, plenty of concentrated black berry fruit and even a twitch of savoury oak – at just about any price this is a wonderful wine, that benefits greatly from decanting. Drink: 2007-2014. 94 points.

Jasper Hill Emily's Paddock Shiraz Cabernet Franc

2001 (\$80): Earthy, briary, riddled with roasted tomato flavours and spotted with blackberry, this is an elegant wine that's good and fine and worth cellaring, but is not in top form. Citrussy oak and cedar, woodspice and dusty characters complete the impression. Drink: 2003-2008. 87 points.

Jasper Hill Georgia's Paddock Shiraz 2001 (\$80): Distinguished and distinguishable Heathcote shiraz. Essence, deeply plummed, touched by cloves and decidedly expressive – with both a generosity and a tightness to it. There's good, ripe fruit, sweet-ish oak, grainy tannins and a fair flood of seduction to it – it's a lovely wine. Drink: 2003-2009. 92 points.

Marius McLaren Vale Shiraz 2000 (\$23CD): One thing you get accustomed to when you start writing about wine is people approaching you with a whisper that begins something like this: "I've got this wine that I've been putting together in my spare time ..." When I first starting hearing it, I'd get excited – the romance of it, the thrill of uncovering an undiscovered wine. With time you learn that these wines are almost uniformly faulty – they haven't got a distributor for a reason. Dread starts to set in. Years ago, when I moved more in literature circles, the same dread came with the words "I've been writing this book. Would you read ..." About a month ago I received an email from Roger Pike. I quote this email: "after countless years of drinking and dreaming, Marius Shiraz has arrived. A great patch of dirt at McLaren Vale, I planted four acres of Shiraz in '94, then proceeded to devote my evenings and week-ends to training, spraying and pruning the beasts. To cut a long story short, the 2000 fruit met my parameters and 50% of it went to the inaugural Marius Shiraz. I decided to avoid the aggressive American oak of the time and went French, 60% new. The result is now ready to go." So what's it like? I wouldn't be writing about it if it wasn't different – unquestionably, it's very good. Ripe red and black berry fruits are interwoven with a savoury choc-caramel sweetness; there's a fair hit of liqueured-coffee on the finish and it's all syrupy and velvety, ripe and intense – though with some fruit-driven elegance. A single vineyard wine from a less-than-ideal vintage – it's very good.

www.mariuswines.com.au. Drink: Now-2010. 91 points.

Occam's Razor Shiraz 2001 (\$38): Initial release of Emily Laughton – daughter of Ron Laughton (of Jasper Hill). It's made using Heathcote fruit and there's a full swag of mint, plum, stalk, sandalwood and dusty flavour, with a lovely, juicy, super-smooth attraction to it. If there's a criticism it's that it lacks a pat of added power to the mid-palate, but there's a flair of milk chocolate on the finish and the way it draws through the mouth is both sound and welcoming. Drink: Now-2008. 88 points.