



The foreign region

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Sally Gudgeon steps away from the better-known Victorian wineries to find some pleasant surprises and bargains.

THERE are glamour wine regions. There are trendy wine regions. There are the areas that attract the tourists and copious media coverage - and then there are the spots that seem to be forgotten or overlooked. Maybe because they have been there a long time, and aren't the latest thing. Or perhaps it's because they don't come neatly packaged, in the style of Heathcote shiraz or Mornington Peninsula pinot.

Victoria has 19 wine regions. It's worth stepping off the beaten track and giving your palate a taste of some of the offerings from the less familiar places. You'll get a pleasant surprise and find some bargains, too. Geelong

A decaying monument to Geelong's glorious winemaking past is crumbling on private land off the Midland Highway. Roofless, strangled by ivy, and shaded by towering peppercorns, the Paradise Winery moulds itself to the landscape, the perfect setting for an illicit assignation in a Gothic novel. The three-level bluestone edifice, circa 1860, has been in disuse since the early 1900s when the roof was removed. This was no mishap, but the work of a zealous teetotaler wife. Her action seems excessive, for, by the time the roof was removed, wine (at least from grapes) was no longer being produced in the region. The discovery of phylloxera in Geelong in the mid-1870s had resulted in a mass vine pull. By the end of the 1860s about 400 hectares were under vine, and what had been the main wine-growing region of colonial Victoria was completely devastated.

It would take almost a century for the industry to revive. Now there are 25 wineries in the region, and the size of the area under vine is similar to what it was the 19th century.

Across the road from the former Paradise Winery, one of the four original Batesford vineyards is back in business. Owned in the latter part of the 19th century by Swiss migrant J.H. Dardel, it now forms part of Moorabool Estate, under the guidance of Ruth and Graham Bonney, who have their own micro-winery on site. As Dardel recognised, it is one of the best wine-growing sites in Geelong, with well-drained slopes and a north-easterly aspect. Shiraz, cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay thrive in the sandy granite soils. It's a vineyard with a very distinctive terroir (the interaction between soil, climate, aspect and biodiversity), which is expressed in the perfumed, subtle cabernets reminiscent of Chateaux Margaux in Bordeaux, and the peppery, intense shirazes. The wines are beautifully balanced, with lively acid and vibrant fruit.

About 20 minutes' drive from Moorabool Estate is another recently revitalised historic site. Three scientists, Ray Nadeson, Maree Collis and Adrian Thomas, founded Lethbridge Wines in 1996. Swiss migrants first planted their Estate vineyard in 1874. Lethbridge also sources grapes from another historic vineyard in Mount Duneed, which was first planted in 1858, and was one of the first vineyards to be replanted as the Geelong region re-emerged in the 1960s and '70s.

The Lethbridge winery-cellar door is a solid, harmonious building made from straw bales. It encapsulates the Lethbridge philosophy of environmental sustainability and biodynamic viticulture. Winemaker Nadeson is passionate and meticulous, making wines that express the terroir of his different sites. He makes an impressive range of distinctive, well-priced wines: pinot noir, merlot, sauvignon blanc-semillon. zinfandel. chardonnay. pinot gris. vin gris. sangiovese. rose

and his flagship Indra shiraz (which has a touch of viognier). The Indra shiraz is a desert island wine; concentrated and intense yet supple and elegant with everything in the right place.

Just up the road from Lethbridge, Janet Cockbill and Nicholas Clark, at Amietta, are the smallest commercial producers in the region. It's easy to miss their two-car "garagiste" winery when confronted with the spectacular view of their vineyard clinging to the precipitous slopes of the Moorabool Valley. They are organic producers who also practise some biodynamic methods, such as carrying out the main tasks in the vineyard and winery according to the appropriate phase of the moon. They have won medals for riesling and shiraz, and also make a cabernet blend and a rose.

- Moorabool Estate

Ph: 5276 1536.

Open by appointment

- Lethbridge Wines

Ph: 5281 7221.

Open Thursday to Sunday

- Amietta

Ph: 52817407.

Open by appointment

www.winegeelong.com.au

Upper Goulburn

Head up and over the Great Dividing Range and you will come to the High Country, which has two winegrowing zones, the Upper Goulburn and the Strathbogie ranges. It's hard to make generalisations about the wineries in the Upper Goulburn. The region has about 23 wine labels and more than 30 vineyards, spread over two huge shires, Murrindindi and Mansfield. There are enormous soil and climate differences in the region, and as yet no sub-regions. Even the name "Upper Goulburn" is contentious; it is often confused with the "Goulburn Valley", and many producers think the former name, "Central Victorian High Country", has a better ring. After all, it is the ultimate cool-climate region, renowned for pinot noir and chardonnay, much of which goes into sparkling wines.

Delatite, the oldest winery in the region, places emphasis on aromatic white varieties: sauvignon blanc, pinot gris, gewurztraminer, and riesling, all of which excel in the region. Merlot does well, too, and there are even warmer sites in the area where shiraz and cabernet sauvignon thrive.

The list does not end here. Every region has its innovators. Luis Riebl, at Tallarook, is producing stunning wines from the Northern Rhone varieties; marsanne, roussanne and viognier. Tallarook has many similarities to the Northern Rhone with its granitic masses and continental climate. Marketing manager Anthony Woollams points out that central Victoria has enormous potential to become "the world's leader with marsanne". He is also enthusiastic about the quality of roussanne the region can produce.

Terra Felix is Tallarook's second label. It came about because Riebl's son, Felix (who's in the band Cat Empire), wanted well-made, affordable wines that go well with food. Priced at about \$15, the wines have achieved Riebl's aim, and the four Terra Felix wines, two of them Rhone blends, are some of the most exciting available at the price.

There is a strong movement to sustainable and organic methods in the Upper Goulburn region. Just outside Yea is Rees Miller Estate, owned by David Miller and Sylke Rees. Miller publishes Grass Roots magazine, and in keeping with its philosophy, has just been approved as an organic producer. Geese peck for grubs in the paddock and sheep keep the weeds under control in the vineyard. In contrast to most wineries in the area, Rees Miller has planted only reds - pinot, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and shiraz. Miller is excited because although the vines are still relatively young (seven years) he is beginning to

see the terroir in his wines. If you

are after "fruit bombs", look elsewhere - the Rees Miller style is restrained, elegant and distinctly European.

- Delatite

5775 2922. Open seven days

- Tallarook 98183 455

Not open to the public

- Rees Miller Estate 5797 2101

Open weekends and public holidays

www.uppergoulburnwines.org.au

Port Phillip zone

Around Gippsland are small wineries that are technically part of the broader Port Phillip zone. While efforts are being made to establish regions, the process takes a critical mass, and it also takes time. It's an area where chardonnay, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc are the main varieties, producing individual, stylish cool-climate wines. The region has some outstanding sauvignon blancs, great with local asparagus.

Less than 50 minutes' drive from Melbourne, just outside Pakenham on Mount Burnett, is Chestnut Hill, owned by Charlie and Ivka Javor. If you visit the cellar door in autumn, you will be greeted by the smell of chestnuts roasting; the ideal match for their crisp, zesty sauvignon blanc. They also have an outstanding chardonnay, lean, racy and rippling with mineral-stone fruit characters, and a little pinot noir and nebbiolo. Rare apple and plum trees also grow on the property, and two years ago they put in a truffle plantation of oak, hazelnut and ilex saplings whose roots have been inoculated with black truffle spores. In a few years there will hopefully be a crop, and they'll be delicious in a risotto with the Chestnut Hill nebbiolo.

Limbic wines, owned by Jenny and Michael Pullar, is a new label in the area to look out for. They have just released a chardonnay, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc, and plan to open a cellar door this year.

After a successful battle with cancer, Sergio Carlei, from Green Vineyards, moved to organic viticulture. His home vineyard in Upper Beaconsfield is biodynamic and he sources fruit only from other organic vineyards for the Green Vineyards label. He's a pinotophile, and makes one of the best pinots in the area. Not to be missed either is his Tre Bianchi chardonnay-sembillon-sauvignon blanc blend.

The name Cannibal Creek conjures up all sorts of gory images, but as Pat Hardiker, owner-winemaker of Cannibal Creek Vineyard in Tynong North, points out, the origin of the name is more prosaic. It's a derivation of Connabul, the name of the first family to lease the land in 1846. It's an interesting piece of dirt, too, rich in minerals, with a bedrock of Tynong grey granite. Not only does the granite make impressive monuments, such as the Shrine of Remembrance, it also gives a powerful mineral quality to the Cannibal Creek wines: a

chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, cabernet sauvignon and merlot. Hardiker had a previous career as a carpenter, and his master craftsmanship shows in the quality of his wines. For him, it's all about "patience and attention to detail".

Andrew Clarke, at Jinks Creek in Tonimbuk near the Bunyip State Forest, says he "likes to do my own thing". He makes a chardonnay, a sauvignon blanc and a pinot noir from his home vineyard, and three shirazes from single vineyards in three Victorian regions: Longford in East Gippsland, Heathcote and the Yarra Valley. All three are made the same way in open-top fermenters, and given the same oak regime, yet they have entirely different personalities. It's a clever demonstration of the unique character of individual regions in Victoria.

- Chestnut Hill

Ph: 5942 7314

Open weekends and public holidays

- Cannibal Creek

Ph: 5942 8380

Open weekends and public holidays

- Limbic Wines

Ph: 5942 7723

- Green Vineyards

Ph: 5944 4599

- Jinks Creek

Ph: 03 5629 8502 Pyrenees

Although the established wineries in the region are household names - Dalwhinnie, Redbank, Blue Pyrenees Estate, Warrenmang, Taltarni - mention the Pyrenees to many people and they're not quite sure where it is, or they think of France. It's only two hours' drive from Melbourne, and most of the 20 cellar doors are within easy driving distance of one another. It's worth spending a few days in this fascinating region to really get to know its wines.

One of the most exciting aspects of the Pyrenees wines is their distinct regional style. The reds, in particular, have an astonishing fruit purity, layer upon layer of flavour and texture and great depth of colour. Shiraz is the superstar in the region, making some of the best examples in Australia. There are few wines more seductive than these exquisitely perfumed shirazes, with their black pepper-spice aromas, silky texture and fine tannins. Some of the best are from Dalwhinnie, Warrenmang, Summerfield, Pyrenees Ridge, Blue Pyrenees Estate and Taltarni.

Cabernet sauvignon performs impressively here, too, with juicy blackcurrant characters, ripe tannins and good acidity. Alcohol levels tend to be high with some producers, but most manage to avoid jammy-porty-dead-fruit characters in their reds. The current-release Blue Pyrenees Richardson Series 2002 cabernet is particularly good. Merlot does well in the region, too - look out for the silky, juicy example from Mount Avoca Vineyard.

While the Pyrenees is famed for its classic varieties, some producers are experimenting with other grapes. Quoin Hill Vineyard makes a delicious pinot grigio and small quantities of tempranillo. Peerick makes a lean, minerally viognier, which is quite outstanding.

In the region, 2003 was a difficult vintage, with reduced yields due

to very hot weather during flowering. Last year, however, was the vintage everyone had been waiting for, with good yields and exceptional quality. Judging by the barrel samples tasted throughout the region, it is one to stock up on when the wines are released in a few years.

- Blue Pyrenees Estate

Ph: 5465 3202

- Dalwhinnie Vineyard

Ph: 5467 2388

- Mount Avoca

5465 3282

- Peerick Vineyard

5467 2207

- Pyrenees Ridge Vineyard

54 65 3710

- Redbank Winery

5467 7255

- Quoin Hill Vineyard

5343 5365

- Summerfield Wines

5467 2264

- Taltarni Vineyards

5459 7918

- Warrenmang Vineyard & Resort 5467 2233

www.pyreneestourism.com.au
