

TASTE | food&winenews

on the **GRAPEVINE**

New varieties, new facilities, new winemakers – even with all the doom and gloom, the state's wine industry isn't staying still this winter.



MER-LOW SELF ESTEEM

What's black(ish), white and not read about all over? According to Mark Gifford of Margaret River's Blue Poles Vineyard: merlot, the wine industry's red grape white elephant. "Honestly, I could have made Chateau Petrus and it would have gone through to the keeper," laments the eloquent winemaker.

But Mark's not letting anyone deter him from his goal of crafting serious wines that put merlot front and centre rather than squibbling it away as a poor bridesmaid to cabernet. Although many in the industry blame poor clones for the underwhelming merlot being produced across the state, Mark believes this poor showing is more a case of vigneron not giving the variety the attention it needs in the vineyard, claiming he spends just as much time in the vines in spring as he does during winter pruning. Keeping crop levels to less than four tonne a hectare is also important.

A tasting through current and past vintage releases suggests his efforts are paying off. Beautifully structured, elegant and a world away from the Christmas pudding fruit bombs most of us associate with the grape, Blue Poles merlot wines are just as expressive of terroir and vintage as any Margaret River cabernet. And with Mark eagerly counting down the days to his vintage experience at Girolate near St Emilion – the Bordeaux region regarded as the variety's spiritual home – expect the wines to get even better as he learns from the masters. (08) 9757 4382, bluepolesvineyard.com.au



A PLUMM JOB

Just as the emergence of oenology in Australia, New Zealand, South America et al created the Old World/New World divide, could the launch of a new home-grown stemware brand form a similar rift in the world of glasses? Introducing Plumm, a new Aussie-designed, European-manufactured range of glasses that have been made with Australian wine drinkers in mind. Plumm founder Dana Morris – formerly with Austrian glass manufacturers Riedel – consulted sommeliers, winemakers,

The new kid in town

As if Margaret River didn't have enough regional strong suits, the folk at Forester Estate think they might have uncovered another – the glamorously named alicante bouschet, or alicante for short.

Created in the late 19th century by vine breeder Henri Bouschet when he crossed one of his father's crossings with grenache, alicante slowly crept outwards from its southern French birthplace and can now be found around the world.

While some Australian winemakers have produced a rose from the variety, Forester Estate's Redmond Sweeney believes theirs is Australia's first dry red alicante. After using the 2007 batch as a blending wine, the decision was made to release the 2008 on its own.

"As fruit, the stuff is like home-grown beetroot, just insane colour," he says.

"It ripens fairly early so has never done well in warm regions. Margaret River, being a cooler Mediterranean climate, seems to moderate the likelihood of it becoming overripe too quickly and giving dead fruit characters."

To see the Scoop tasting panel's verdict on the wine, turn to page 202, (08) 9755 2788, foresterestate.com.au