

# PLENTY AWAITS YOU UNDER THIS MISTLETOE

AUSTRALIAN MEDICINE MAY 5 2008 11

WITH JEREMY OLIVER

**IN CASE YOU** were wondering whether or not a Victorian could maintain his enthusiasm for Hunter wine for more than a single article, I have again chosen to feature this unique wine region. Why? The other day I introduced myself to the wines of a relatively new, low-key producer that had certainly crept under my radar for too long – Mistletoe.

Sited on land once known as Mistletoe Farm, Mistletoe struck me immediately as a consistent maker of spotlessly clean and deliciously vibrant Hunter wines that reflect and respect their regional origins.

Though the company does produce several wines from varieties such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot that were not grown in the Hunter – and which are clearly identified as such – its typical regional folio is structured around the varieties of chardonnay, semillon and shiraz.



Essentially, there are two ranges of each variety, a regional Hunter range that sells for around \$20 per bottle and a Reserve collection of estate-grown individual vineyard wines sourced from the property's oldest plantings that date back around 40 years or so.

The Reserve wines fetch around \$30-\$35 and, like the other Mistletoe wines, represent outstanding value for money. With great emphasis and concentration of fruit, plus some finer and newer oak influence in the chardonnay and shiraz, the Reserve wines are typically more complex, better structured and more tightly focused.

Importantly, they achieve this without sacrificing any of the elegance and shyness so integral to the character of genuinely regional Hunter wine.

A family-owned business established in 1989, Mistletoe is found on Hermitage Road, Pokolbin. It doesn't sell its wine at retail and has steadily been increasing its still small production runs so all can be sold via its cellar door or website. Smart thinking, really, if you can get away without losing retail and wholesale margins.



In control of winemaking and viticulture is a top young Hunter winemaker, Nick Paterson, who cut his teeth at his family's small winery of Chateau Pato. Before his arrival at Mistletoe, Paterson had spent time with two legendary Hunter producers, Brokenwood and Tyrrells.

Like most people, I judge a Lower Hunter winery by the clip of its semillon, and this is where Mistletoe is immediately impressive. Its wines appear to marry the intense, finely honed flavours associated with classic examples of this style with the sculpted shape and minerality that people such as Andrew Thomas are introducing to the regional theme.

The Home Vineyard Semillon 2007 weighs in at an appropriate 10 per cent alcohol, yet not for a moment does it want for concentration or texture. Lightly mineral and surprisingly intense, it delivers a lightly herbal expression of melon and citrus flavour with a chalky undercarriage of lemon sherbet.

The Reserve Semillon 2007 is a class act. A very stylish and shapely version of high-end contemporary Hunter semillon whose intense, slightly tropical fruit is underpinned by chalky mineral influences and finished with a tangy, briny note.

While I don't yet think the 'standard' chardonnays are of quite the same standard as their semillon equivalents, they do share the focus, tautness and crispness of these wines.



I'd drink them between two and five years of age, while they retain enough tightness and focus to finish crisply and handle food more

naturally. I like the potential of the sweet and juicy 2007 Reserve Chardonnay, which should develop similar pleasing mealy and funky complexity as the 2005.

Nick Paterson is also applying a slightly modern spin to traditional Hunter shiraz. Polished and brightly flavoured, they are elegant, fine-grained and savoury, capturing the sour-edged essence of dark blackberries and plums.

The 'standard' shiraz receives maturation in only older oak, which helps to explain its balance and restraint, while the Reserve edition sees a combination of new, second- and third-year cooperage, since its additional weight and intensity enable it to soak up more oak influences without compromising balance and focus. I particularly like the seamless 2005 Shiraz, which is beginning to reveal some gamey flavour development.

There's an honesty about these wines – in the quality of their making, in their reproduction of a respected regional style, and ultimately where it always really counts – in their price. You might have to try a little harder to find wines from Mistletoe, but nothing I have tasted so far would suggest the effort is not worth every bit.

## Oliver's Choice

### Mistletoe Reserve Semillon 2007



A modern impression of a timeless classic, this long, tightly-focused and finely-sculpted semillon presents a pristine and juicy expression of melon, lemon and guava-like flavour backed by a chalky lick of minerality. It's delicate and dusty, with a particularly floral bouquet and a layered, savoury palate that culminates in a tangy, dry and briny finish.

Stupendous value!