Peninsula Wine Country

Just an easy hour from the city, the Peninsula provides a great escape for wine lovers and rewards those who enjoy the best things in life. Walk pristine beaches and spectacular cliff tops, catch a wave, paddle a sea kayak, tackle the fairway at Cape Schanck, or sip a seductive pinot noir – and feel the difference when you visit the Mornington Peninsula. This is a special place where vines thrive in sheltered undulating valleys nurtured by a maritime cool climate that together create elegant, personality-packed award-winning wines.

HISTORY OF THE PENINSULA WINE REGION

Wine production on the Peninsula dates back to 1886, when Dromana wine won an honourable mention in the Intercontinental Exhibition. In 1891, fourteen Peninsula grape growers were mentioned in a Royal Commission into the Fruit and Vegetable Industry. In the 1920s, many of the Mornington Peninsula's vineyards were abandoned or uprooted. In the 1950s, Seppelt and Seabrook operated a vineyard in Dromana, but this was destroyed by fire in 1967.

The renaissance of the region's wine industry began in 1972 when a number of aspiring vignerons independently recognised the potential of the unique maritime climate of the Mornington Peninsula for producing high quality cool climate varieties, similar to those of the great wine producing regions of France.

The main grape varieties grown in the Region are Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Shiraz. Some of the more innovative plantings have included Riesling and Tempranillo. Today, there are more than 200 vineyards, of which over half are less than 5 acres and two thirds less than 10 acres. The Region also boasts 50 wineries with cellar doors.

The Mornington Peninsula Wine Region continues to develop and is rapidly becoming recognized as Australia's leading producer of high quality maritime, cool climate wines, in particular Pinot Noir.

FRIENDS OF THE MP VIGNERONS

The Friends of the Mornington Peninsula Vignerons (FMPV) is a social group of food and winelovers who get together at regular intervals for informal functions with the focus on Mornington Peninsula (MP) wines and vineyards and to support MP vignerons. The functions are, where possible, held at the wineries /vineyards and include barbecues, tastings (including comparative tastings with other cool climate wine regions), winery tours and the Annual Dinner where carefully aged wines from the FMPV's cellar are partaken with much delight. Also from time to time cameo sessions are arranged for special interest wine related topics .

The FMPV was established some twenty two years ago by a group of wine lovers who were helping some of the early winegrowers and eventually decided to formalise the group into an identifiable entity.

Known generally as the FMPV or by the vignerons as "the Friends" it is quite a unique group possibly being the only one of its kind in Australia

and vignerons from other regions have been heard to say that they wish they too had their own "fan club" .

Besides the regular social activity some members enjoy "hands on" involvement by volunteering to pick grapes and each year the FMPV volunteers assist with the Winter Wine Weekend exhibition at Red Hill. The FMPV also presents an annual Award for Excellence to a vigneron in recognition of their contribution to quality winemaking, enhancement of MP wines and development.

The growth of the wine industry on the MP over the last ten years has resulted in some eighty cellar doors which certainly provides scope for FMPV members to continue tasting all the wonderful MP wines.

People interested in finding out more about the FMPV activities may contact the President - Graeme Buckley on 03- 97879616.

A NEW GENERATION... ROLLO CRITTENDEN THE YOUNG GUN OF WINE

Second generation Peninsula winemaker, Rollo has won the prestigious 2010 Australian Young Gun of Wine Award. Refreshingly down-to-earth, Rollo says making wine at his family's vineyard in Dromana has allowed him the opportunity to progress interests close to his heart, particularly organic farming. He has also been able to expand the Crittenden portfolio which now includes a range of innovative Spanish wines of pedigree and vibrant personality.

When asked what has contributed most to his recent success, Rollo is circumspect: "It's definitely to do with improvements in the vineyard. We have stopped harmful, outdated practices; we've almost completely wound-up spraying chemicals and needlessly rumbling up-and-down vine rows on a tractor. We are now committed to a far more sensitive approach to viticulture and this includes spreading compost under vines, reducing chemicals, green mulching and adopting a hands-off approach", he says.

Positives can be found throughout the current range of Crittenden wines with many exhibiting good balance, structure and that all important 'sense of place'. Rollo says his experiences from making wine in other parts of the world, particularly Italy have helped push the envelope in technique and style. The lesser known Spanish and Italian varieties are a singular passion. Asked what gun he'd take to a knife fight, the newly crowned Young Gun of Wine says, "I would reach for one of my Spanish wines. These are under the Los Hermanos label and include, Homenaje a Cataluna a savoury and complex Catalonian-style red blend, Tributo a Galicia a Savagnin (previously thought to be Albariño in Australia) a subtly aromatic and crisp white wine and Tempranillo- a red wine of vibrancy, tannin and structure.

Rollo sees the Spanish varieties more as a point of interest than the main event: "They are approachable, great food wines but we are definitely not moving away from the tradition of Burgundian varieties," he says.

To this end, Crittenden continues to make three distinct Pinot Noirs. There's the entry level Geppetto, a multi regional blend made for early drinking and above that there is Crittenden Estate a wine which takes the middle ground between fruit-driven and more complex and structured. The Zumma is a Pinot Noir of outstanding pedigree, demonstrating a level of elegance and restraint only attained from the best fruit sourced from the family's 30 year old Dromana Pinot Noir vineyard. Fine silky tannins, restrained oak and taut acidity provide the palate with great length and balance.

Rollo continues to work alongside his father, the indomitable Garry Crittenden who planted vines over thirty years ago. During his career, Garry oversaw a successful horticulture business before developing vineyards on his Dromana property. Today he's recognised as one of the true pioneers of the region, at the forefront of promoting Peninsula Chardonnay and Pinot Noir internationally and, more recently, Italian grape varieties. His particular style and formula is based on determination and smart, no-nonsense marketing. Rollo has flair and is innovative too but is somewhat more laidback than his dad. His philosophy is simple: "With minimal intervention such as wild yeast ferment, subtle oak and less winemaking artifacts in my wines I just try & make wine that is more interesting. What makes an interesting wine for me? Length on the pallet is very important but so too are aromatics – I'm always trying to come up with something just that little bit more beguiling for the drinker," he says.

Two other second generation winemakers from the Mornington Peninsula, Mike Aylward from Ocean Eight, and Dan Buckle (now at Mount Langi Ghiran), the son of one of the founders of the local industry, Roger Buckle, were also finalists in the Award.

- Arthur O'Bryan