



Omaka Reserve Chardonnay (NZ\$26.95). This consistency just got it over the line from the Mulderbosch, despite first-placed votes from Robert Joseph and myself for the controlled, stylish complexity of the 2003 Mulderbosch Barrel Fermented. Overall, this was a strong class, particularly with the top 10 wines.

The success of the 2000 Pewsey Vale Museum Reserve The Contours Riesling (A\$25.95/NZ\$27.95) in the aromatic class was as clear-cut as it was predictable; if anyone still doubts the capacity of screwcapped wines to age with infinite grace, this is as convincing proof as any. The only other wine to score strongly (again, with support across the board) was the 2004 Villa Maria Single Vineyard Keltarn Gewürztraminer (A\$35/NZ\$29.95) – far beyond anything Australia (or South Africa) are able to produce with this variety, and laden with spicy lychee fruit.

The first thing I wrote when I smelled the 2004 Matua Valley Paretai Sauvignon Blanc (NZ\$28.95), was “will polarise opinion”. (I might as well have added what I also knew: “... and I will be left alone like a shag on a rock.”) I am acutely sensitive to, and intensely dislike, the sweaty armpit character which some highly regarded sauvignon blancs have. It may be an aspect of varietal character, but (mercifully) it is not a universal one. The 2004 Limbic Sauvignon Blanc (A\$24), by contrast, was a spotlessly clean mix of kiwifruit, gooseberry and a twist of lemon.

The wooded white wine class was smaller than all the others because New Zealand makes so few of these outside chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. The Aussie 2004 Cape Jaffa Brocks Reef Semillon Sauvignon Blanc (A\$16) emerged the winner – above South Africa’s

2002 Rijk’s Semillon – crystal-bright and clean, it had no hint of sweaty reduction, and a long, intense palate.

I’ve already covered Class 6; Class 7 was a first-time inclusion for rosés. Five wines stood out like beacons in an otherwise ordinary class, in which the top two were the 2004 Pepperjack Grenache Rosé (A\$23) and the 2005 Charles Melton Rose of Virginia (A\$19/NZ\$19.95). The others were the 2004 Turkey Flat (A\$17.50/NZ\$24), the 2004 Spy Valley (NZ\$16.95), from New Zealand, and the 2004 Yering Station ED (A\$17.50), all of which competed valiantly. All are virtually dry, doubling up either as aperitifs or food wines, and are great examples of a wine style enjoying worldwide interest (and sales).

I have largely covered the pinot noirs; the class provoked varying responses (my first place went to the 2003 Dalrymple, A\$25, but no-one else supported me). However, the 2003 Yabby Lake Vineyard Pinot Noir (A\$55) had support across the board, as did the 2003 Carrick from New Zealand (A\$50/NZ\$38.50).

New Zealand utterly dominated the merlot class, although style issues here were as important as they were with the pinots. I had some reservations about the varietal character and style expression of the 2002 Villa Maria Reserve Merlot (A\$60/NZ\$39.95) but still placed it second, Bob Campbell and Michael Fridjhon ranking

it first. Rich, luscious and generous, it is a lovely red wine which just happens to be merlot. The 2002 Mills Reef Elspeth Block 3 Merlot (A\$43/NZ\$36) was the runner-up.

National pride was restored with the next five red wine classes, particularly the shiraz, which New Zealand cheekily won in 2003. The success of the 2002 Wirra Wirra Vineyards RSW Shiraz (NZ\$35.95) gave me infinite pleasure; it was one of five table wines to receive 97 points in my 2006 *Australian Wine Companion* (see News, page 10). Laden with dense but delicious blackberry and dark chocolate, it nevertheless escaped the alcohol trap. The 2002 Kilikanoon Oracle Shiraz, recipient of 96 points in the *Companion*, was a worthy runner-up.

Moss Wood’s success in the cabernet sauvignon class was due reward for a classic wine from a great vintage: the 2001 is a gorgeous wine, silky and long, the epitome of elegance. The 2002 The Yarra Yarra (A\$75), from the other side of the country, has outstanding complexity in a velvety, rich and round framework.

In the Bordeaux blend class, the 2002 Haan Wilhelmus (A\$48) prevailed over the 2001 Houghton Jack Mann (A\$105/NZ\$89.95) because it was well supported by all four judges, but only after some discussion. These were the two standout wines in the class, the Haan with more beautifully integrated oak, the Jack Mann with greater fruit purity and focus.

Four wines stood out in the other red varietal blends, the near misses being the 2002 Charles Melton Nine Popes (A\$43.90) and 2001 Wolf Blass Black Label (A\$81.70/NZ\$135.95). That said, the top two wines were tied, the 2002 Kaesler WOMS (A\$70), a shiraz cabernet, winning only after much discussion and re-tasting. It is, indeed, a

## TASTINGS

"weapon of mass seduction", with its powerful yet silky core of red and black fruits, while the 2002 Murray Street Vineyard Benno Shiraz Mataro (A\$45) was an object lesson in seamless elegance.

The other red varieties provided the most contested class of all: only two wines failed to get some support. But the top two wines were a long way in front, albeit only two points apart from each other: the 2003 Anderson Cellar Block Petit Verdot (A\$39.50), with powerful ripe black fruits, which neatly avoids over-extraction; and the 2002 Stanton & Killeen Durif (A\$30), which provides similar control over dense, rich, black fruits.

South Africa had to wait to the end for its winner but did so in style with the tangy, long and balanced 2004 Nederburg Noble Late Harvest, a marked contrast to the extremely rich and luscious (and two years older) Brown Brothers Patricia Late Harvested Noble Riesling (A\$26/NZ\$29.95, 375ml). I have to admit that two of my favoured wines – the 2004 Mount Horrocks Cordon Cut Riesling (A\$32 – 2005 vintage) and 2002 De Bortoli Noble One Botrytis Semillon (A\$24/NZ\$32.95) – did not garner enough support from my fellow judges, but then's the breaks, as they say.



*Thanks to finetuning of the ranking system, the net result was a genuine consensus outcome.*

### BEST IN SHOW

*Winners and runners-up in the Tri Nations Challenge.*

### TRI NATIONS WINE

**OF THE SHOW**  
NZ 2003 Olssens Slapjack  
Creek Pinot Noir

### WHITE WINE

**OF THE SHOW**  
AUS 1999 McWilliam's Mount  
Pleasant Lovedale Semillon

### RED WINE OF THE SHOW

NZ 2003 Olssens Slapjack  
Creek Pinot Noir

### SPARKLING

AUS 1998 Freycinet Radenti  
Chardonnay Pinot Noir  
AUS 1999 Hardy Arras

### CHARDONNAY

NZ 2003 Saint Clair  
Omaka Reserve Chardonnay  
SA 2003 Mulderbosch  
Barrel Fermented

### AROMATICS

AUS 2000 Pewsey Vale  
Museum Release  
The Contours Riesling  
NZ 2004 Villa Maria  
Single Vineyard Keitern  
Gewürztraminer

### SAUVIGNON BLANC

NZ 2004 Matua Valley  
Pareta Sauvignon  
Blanc

### WOODED WHITE VARIETALS OR BLENDS

AUS 2004 Cape Jaffa  
Brocks Reef Semillon  
Sauvignon Blanc  
SA 2002 Rijk's Semillon

### UNWOODED WHITE VARIETALS OR BLENDS

AUS 1999 McWilliam's  
Mount Pleasant  
Lovedale Semillon  
AUS 1999 Capercaillie  
Hunter Valley Semillon

### ROSE

AUS 2004 Pepperjack  
Grenache Rosé  
AUS 2005 Charles Melton  
Rose of Virginia

### PINOT NOIR

NZ 2003 Olssens Slapjack  
Creek Pinot Noir  
AUS 2003 Yabby Lake  
Vineyard Pinot Noir

### MERLOT

NZ 2002 Villa Maria  
Reserve Merlot  
NZ 2002 Mills Reef  
Elspeth Block 3 Merlot

### SHIRAZ

AUS 2002 Wirra Wirra  
Vineyards RSW Shiraz  
AUS 2002 Kilikanoon  
Oracle Shiraz

### CABERNET SAUVIGNON

AUS 2001 Moss Wood  
Cabernet Sauvignon  
AUS 2002 The Yarra Yarra

### BORDEAUX BLENDS

AUS 2002 Haan Wilhelmus  
AUS 2001 Houghton  
Jack Mann

### OTHER RED VARIETAL BLENDS

AUS 2002 Kaesler WOMS  
AUS 2002 Murray Street  
Vineyard Benno Shiraz Mataro

### OTHER RED VARIETALS

AUS 2003 Anderson  
Cellar Block Petit Verdot  
AUS 2002 Stanton  
& Killeen Durif

### SWEET WINES

SA 2004 Nederburg  
Noble Late Harvest  
AUS 2002 Brown Brothers  
Patricia Late Harvested  
Noble Riesling

*Prices are approximate;  
where unlisted, wines are  
not available in that country.  
To source wines, see page 153.*

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## TASTINGS



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# TRI NATIONS CHALLENGE

National pride was at stake at the third annual competition – inspired by the rugby tournament of the same name – that pits the Southern Hemisphere’s best winemakers against each other to discover who’s on the ball.

By common assent, the judging of this year’s Tri Nations (between, of course, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) was much easier – and more satisfactory – than in previous years. The change which brought this about was the inclusion of a neutral chairman, England’s Robert Joseph. Some finetuning of the ranking system also seemed to help matters, and the net result was a genuine consensus outcome for each of the 15 classes.

At this point, I have to endeavour to avoid triumphalism, but as you will see from the results summary (page 69), Australia made a clean sweep of eight classes, had the top wine in another two, and was placed runner-up in another two. Results for the best wine of show awards were also arrived at by the four judges – Bob Campbell MW (from New Zealand), Michael Fridjhon (South Africa), Robert Joseph and myself – using a ranking system.

The top award went to the 2003 Olssens Slapjack Creek Pinot Noir (A\$47.95/NZ\$90) for the second year in succession, the only difference being the vintage – last year, it was 2002. This wine is one of considerable complexity and richness, which was very highly ranked by three of the four judges in its class.

Slapjack Creek has won numerous awards and plaudits in New Zealand, and is on its way to recognition as a classic. McWilliam’s Mount Pleasant Lovedale Semillon has a 25-year track record, and is well and truly in the classic category. The 1999 (A\$45) had to defeat not only the runner-up (the 1999 Capercaille, A\$25) but also the 1999 Tyrrell’s Belford (A\$40) and 1999 Brokenwood ILR Reserve (A\$43), all of which had strong support. The Lovedale won the Best White Wine of Show award because all four judges were in awe of its green-yellow colour and utterly remarkable freshness and length of flavour.

But to begin at the beginning, as it were, with Class 1, it was, in truth, a victory for Tasmania as much for Australia. Sparkling wine classes are notoriously difficult to judge; the 1998 Freycinet Radenti Chardonnay Pinot Noir (A\$45) won because it was the only wine to receive strong support from all four judges. Like the 1999 Hardys Arras (A\$49), it has wonderful intensity, length and fine acidity. (I had the Arras just ahead for its elegance and finesse.)

Australia was beaten up by both New Zealand and South Africa in the chardonnay class. Here, the top two wines were strongly supported by all four judges, especially the elegant, unforced 2003 Saint Clair