



## Spin the Bottle

# Hunter Valley

Each month, we explore a recognised wine region – taste the wine, check out the cellar doors, sample the food and bed down for a night or two. This month: NSW's Hunter.

STORY BY **PETER BOURNE**

THE HUNTER VALLEY is Australia's oldest wine region, dating back to the 1820s. The rollcall of pioneers in the area began with William Kelman, the brother-in-law of James Busby, whose 500 European vine cuttings kickstarted the country's wine industry. In 1843, Dr Henry Lindeman became the first of several winegrowing doctors in the region, with the dynasties of the Draytons (1853), Tyrrells (1858) and Tullochs (1895) following in his wake. Today, you're likely to be poured a glass of semillon or shiraz by their descendants.

Both varieties have found a special place in the Hunter Valley's warm maritime and subtropical climate. Young semillon is tight, lean, spicy and unburdened by oak. Semillon ages (for up to 30 years) into a rich yet refreshing white with honey and marmalade flavours. Its alter ego, shiraz, is typically medium-bodied here, with an earthy, savoury style. Hunter shiraz from top vintages (2011, 2014 and, potentially, 2017) mellows out after five, 10 and many more years.

The Hunter Valley is right on Sydney's doorstep so a daytrip is possible (but after a couple of glasses of 10-year-old semillon, who wants to drive home?). Its cellar doors are geared towards both the frivolous and serious wine-lover. Some have reserved members-only areas, including Tyrrell's, Tulloch and Brokenwood. There are also lots of small, friendly cellar doors such as David Hook, Gartelmann, McLeish Estate, Usher Tinkler and Tallavera Grove. And don't overlook the Broke Fordwich subregion, where Margan's terrific produce-driven restaurant is just down the road from Krinklewood's biodynamic vineyard.

Semillon and shiraz remain the heroes but it's worth remembering that Australia's love of chardonnay was instigated by Hunter Valley winemaker Murray Tyrrell in the early 1970s and, a decade earlier, Dr Max Lake had planted cabernet sauvignon. Today, there's the new wave of Mediterranean varieties, with Tintilla embracing sangiovese, David Hook having success with pinot grigio and barbera and Andrew Margan venturing towards Spain with tempranillo, graciano and albarino. The region is amazingly diverse, mixing old and new, traditional and modern. You're in for a surprise.

Audrey Wilkinson  
planted Pokolbin's  
first vineyard in 1866



## Tasting notes

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**BROKENWOOD  
SEMILLON**

2016 / \$30

Iain Riggs established a new benchmark for semillon in 1983 with this more forward, fresh gem that has lemongrass and citrusy flavours. At just 10.5 per cent alcohol (which makes an extra glass at lunchtime possible), it forms a textbook duet with freshly shucked Port Stephens oysters.

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**TYRRELL'S  
WINES  
HVD SINGLE  
VINEYARD  
SEMILLON**

2011 / \$35

The HVD vineyard was planted in 1908 on a sandy creek bed, its drainage important during the cyclone-affected seasons. This semillon has candied honey and dried Provence herb aromas and a sleek palate of lemongrass, lime marmalade and ginger tea. Baked snapper, please.

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**MARGAN  
BREAKING  
GROUND  
BARBERA**

2015 / \$40

With their refreshing take on wine and food, Andrew and Lisa Margan are the king and queen of Broke. Their barbera exudes blueberry and riberry fruits, with a pleasing balance of acid and tannin. Pair it with the pork belly on their restaurant's menu (see page 148).

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**MOUNT  
PLEASANT  
ROSEHILL  
VINEYARD  
SHIRAZ**

2014 / \$50

The legendary Maurice O'Shea planted the Rosehill vineyard in 1946. With black fruit and lots of earthy spices (aniseed and clove), this shiraz has a rich mouthfeel and gently persistent finish. It deserves cellaring for 10 years but would be more than happy with lamb shanks now.

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**TULLOCH  
PRIVATE BIN  
POKOLBIN DRY  
RED SHIRAZ**

2015 / \$52

The Tulloch family celebrated its 120th anniversary in 2015 and this is a suitably old-school dry red. Its modest 12.9 per cent alcohol tells of a tricky vintage but the flavours are sweet and red-fruited, with a subtle palate and soft, fluffy tannins. Beef bourguignon is the ideal pairing.

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Sam McAdam-Cooper