



Spin the Bottle

Macedon Ranges

Some of Australia's best boutique wineries are just outside Melbourne. This month, we visit their cellar doors, sample the food and stay a night or two.



STORY BY PETER BOURNE

THEY'RE JUST one hour's drive from Melbourne but the grapevines of the Macedon Ranges largely fly under the radar, playing second fiddle to the area's bigger stars: Geelong, the Yarra Valley and the Mornington Peninsula. Still, it's a mistake to discount a region that produces some of Australia's best sparkling wine.

The Macedon Ranges' charming towns – such as Gisborne, Woodend, Lancefield and Kyneton – are assembled within a triangle formed by Sunbury, Daylesford and Castlemaine. The region is chilly, as the locals will attest, but it was the cool climate that enticed Melbourne restaurateur Tom Lazar to Kyneton in 1968. Although he first planted black cherries that failed, his Virgin Hills became one of Victoria's first boutique wineries and quickly acquired a cult following. The likes of Granite Hills (trial plantings in 1970), Cope-Williams (1977) and Hanging Rock (1982) followed, before being joined by artisan winegrowers Bindi (1988) and Curly Flat (1992).

Because of the cool and sometimes cold, wet early vintages and the minuscule scale of the pioneering wineries, the Macedon Ranges wine district evolved slowly. But grow it has. The high altitude and chilly conditions are perfect for quality sparkling wine – a focus led by Cope-Williams and Hanging Rock, which both proudly badge their bubbles as “Macedon brut”. Ethereal aromatics (think riesling and sauvignon blanc) and spicy reds complete the area's vinous profile.

Many wine producers predominantly sell through family-owned cellar doors and function venues. Cope-Williams has multifaceted facilities – there's even a cricket pitch – and you'll receive a warm welcome from the stalwarts at Granite Hills and Hanging Rock.

Arguably the most spectacular cellar door is Shadowfax. It can claim to be Melbourne's closest vineyard and has a highly lauded restaurant, too. With drawcards this compelling, the Macedon Ranges shouldn't be overlooked.

(From top) Hanging Rock Winery takes its name from the nearby geological formation; stock up on sourdough at RedBeard bakery



Tasting notes

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**BINDI
KOSTAS RIND
CHARDONNAY**

2016 / \$55

Michael Dhillon draws from a 1.5-hectare site planted in 1988 for this chardonnay, named in honour of his father's vinous mentor. White peach and crushed quartz define the nose, with intense fruit flavours of a similar ilk echoed on the palate. The texture is subtle with a pleasing tannin grip that goes perfectly with roast chicken.

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**CURLY FLAT
PINOT NOIR**

2015 / \$52

Things are changing at Curly Flat, with ex-Shadowfax winemaker Matt Harrop joining the team. However, this delightfully pure, sweet-fruited gem predates Harrop's arrival. Red berries and subtle oak-derived tannins dominate. Serve it with duck.

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**GRANITE HILLS
RIESLING**

2016 / \$25

Llew Knight has helped to lift his parents' pioneering winery to new heights, with this piercingly bright riesling leading the way. It's tight and steely with a fine-boned palate. Its mouth-watering lemon sorbet flavours and zesty acidity are made for freshly shucked oysters.

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**COPE-WILLIAMS
MACEDON BRUT**

NV / \$50

Winemaker Gordon Cope-Williams is a sparkling-wine specialist and his Macedon brut combines intensity and complexity in a restrained, savoury style. Aromas of warm bread and glacé fruit with a lift of lemon thyme round out the rich flavours. Enjoy it with salmon cakes.

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**COBAW RIDGE
L'ALTRA SYRAH**

2013 / \$36

The Coopers (father Alan and son Joshua) farm biodynamically at their elevated 600-metre site. The result? Pure and intense wines. Spicy aromas of raspberries and star-anise mingle with dried herbs and hints of sweet mocha in this syrah. Pair it with a steak-and-kidney pie.

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Craig Mall