

WORDS SALLY GUDGEON

Palate pleasers

Many Barossa wines clamour for attention, but these quiet achievers deliver subtle elegance.

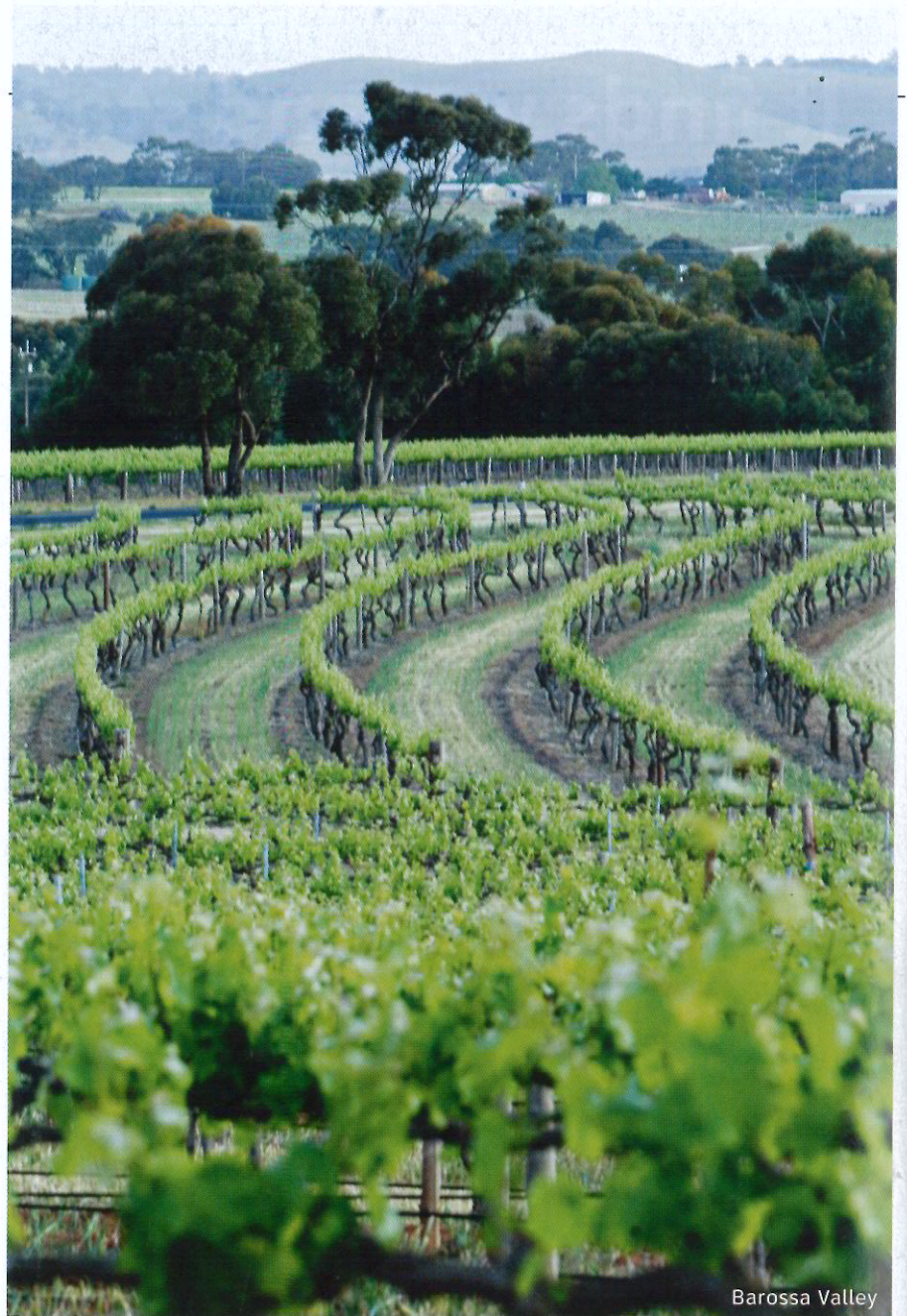
IN THE BAROSSA VALLEY, a new breed of winemakers is making its mark. The Barossa put big, bold, shiraz on the map, but since the 1990s the style has been a caricature in some winemakers' hands. Alcohol and sugar levels crept up – some shiraz is more akin to fortified wine than dry red – and excessive use of oak and added tannins resulted in monstrous wines.

Going against the bigger-is-better trend, the new generation is producing some elegant, easy-drinking wines that complement food rather than devour it.

Spinifex is one such brand, founded by husband and wife Peter Schell and Magali Gely, who draw inspiration from the supple, food-friendly southern French wines. Top-quality fruit is a priority. Schell sources grapes from some 30 Barossa growers with low-yielding, dry-grown vines aged from 60 to 140 years. Spinifex and Cigale wines (their second label) express the vineyard, not the winemaker or cooper. They are eloquent with vibrant fruit and lithe texture, and Spinifex has an extra dimension of fruit concentration and structure.

The O'Callaghan brothers of Diggers Bluff also aim for elegance. Their name has a resonance in the Barossa Valley – Tim and Travis are fourth-generation winemakers. "All those days of being naughty when we were younger, sneaking in and nicking Dad's wines, are paying off in what we're now making," Travis says.

Diggers Bluff wines feel distinctly retro, which is intentional. They recall the late



Barossa Valley

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1970s and early 1980s, when alcohol levels were lower and oak was a background harmony, not a centre-stage performer. The cabernet shiraz blend was popular then, but has since fallen out of favour, perhaps due to the trend to blend shiraz with viognier.

"It's a style we've always loved," Travis says of cabernet shiraz. "With the drop in

cabernet prices in recent years we can source some great fruit."

John Edwards (Mt Billy) also has access to great fruit. He describes himself as a "flavourist", aiming to "capture the essence of the Barossa vineyard in the bottle, rather than making a blockbuster". Winemaker Dan Standish makes some Mt Billy wines in the southern Rhône mould, with secondary rather than primary fruit characters and richness and breadth on the palate.

And the palate is what it's all about. If you want to taste the food you're eating as well as the wine you're drinking, try some of these new-style Barossa wines. Your tongue will thank you for it. >

Barossa braves

The Barossa has a lot of great wines to offer: these five are among the best from the region.



Cigale Grenache Mourvèdre Shiraz 2005 \$22

A southern Rhône-inspired wine with a haunting perfume; spice, black cherries and raspberries intermingle on the nose. The palate is classy and everything works in harmony: fine tannins, subtle fruit and a firm acid structure. Cigale wines are available only via info@spinifex.com.au

Christian Chenin Blanc 2005 \$22

Made by Christian Canute and produced by Rusden wines, this is possibly one of the best chenin blancs in Australia. Hand-picked, basket-pressed and barrel-fermented in French oak. An aromatic, textured wine with tingling acidity.

Turkey Flat Rosé 2006 \$20

A delicious blend of grenache, shiraz, cabernet sauvignon and dolcetto. Vibrant in colour and fruit profile, this rosé has luscious summer berry aromas and flavours. It's got plenty of body in the mouth, with some mid-palate fruit sweetness. A wonderful summer quaffer.

Mt Billy Harmony Shiraz Mataro Grenache 2003 \$24

Swirl the glass and an exotic spice bazaar will unfold under your nose. In the mouth, this wine is medium-bodied, with sappy, lively fruit, fine tannins and a firm, savoury finish.

Diggers Bluff Watchdog Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz 2000 \$30

A pleasure to taste a wine that is released with some bottle age and shows secondary earthy, leather aromas on the nose. Electric synergy between two grape varieties; cabernet gives structure and finesse, and the shiraz enriches and fleshes out the mid-palate. 🌐



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