

top drop

with david sutherland

gapsted ballerina canopy sauvignon blanc

vintage: 2008  
price: \$19

THE majority of the fruit for this wine came from the Cavedon vineyard in the King Valley, with a judicious 15 per cent of New Zealand fruit as well.

The 2007 wine was 100 per cent New Zealand so this isn't a surprise and gives a little continuity of style. A lovely balance of riper tropical peach, lychee and melon flavours intertwine with slightly greener flavours and aromas of gooseberry and lemongrass.

with food: antipasto, smoked trout  
ageing: drink within 12 months  
RATING: ★★½  
IN A WORD: excellent



mount majura pinot gris

vintage: 2008  
price: \$20

MOUNT Majura continues to produce highly commendable wines, in both red and white guises.

From the Canberra Wine District, this vineyard is particularly well sited and seems to be pushing the boundaries in terms of viticulture and the resultant quality of its wines.

Pinot gris can often be soft, blousy and rather high in alcohol, both in Australia and its native Alsace. This wine seems to be able to avoid this with lowish alcohol (12.3 per cent) and lovely fresh acidity to complement its classical fruit profile of nuts, stone fruit and spice.

And there is still good texture and richness on the palate despite the relatively low alcohol. Yum!

with food: a great versatile food wine. Sauced chicken for starters!  
ageing: drink over the next three years  
RATING: ★★★★★  
IN A WORD: terrific



boggy creek sauvignon blanc

vintage: 2008  
price: \$20

I CONTINUE to be encouraged by the quality and style of Aussie sauvignons, from both local producers and those from further afield.

I am serving flights of sauvignon at the restaurant and the majority of patrons are favouring the Aussie wine I am serving or the French one over the overtly fruity style of the New Zealand wine. The choice is usually dependent on whether food is involved.

This wine is tight and crisp, with lovely Sancerre-like grassy and herbal fruit characters on the nose and palate rather than the tropical flavours associated with the NZ styles. A terrific food wine.

with food: ideal with oysters or grilled white-fleshed fish  
ageing: drink during the next two years  
RATING: ★★★★★  
IN A WORD: refreshing



tastings

with david sutherland



Whisky in a special place

MY annual bushwalking pilgrimage to Tasmania recently took a week out of my January and is one of my most eagerly anticipated events of the year.

Upon reflection after the event, and also during the actual execution of the gruelling trek, the toughness and serious wilderness conditions were acknowledged by each member of the group and certainly by its fearless leader.

But it is amazing how quickly the pain and lack of comfort fades into the distance and we all start talking about doing it all again.

Many of my friends think I'm nuts doing activities like serious bushwalking.

"How do you go without a bottle of red each night?" they all ask.

"And you're not getting any younger, you know!"

Well, they are right about the latter. It takes longer to recover from the ordeal now than it did 15 or 20 years ago.

Ten days since emerging from the bush, my feet haven't fully recovered and the knees are still a bit

puffy. And that's even with a formidable pharmacy of drugs on board at the time.

So when undertaking such a tough walk one needs to give careful consideration to one's choice of "poison", if liquor is being taken along.

The underlying consideration, when you are carrying tents and provisions for six days, is that of weight. A light and strong container is a must, which is usually a Sigg aluminium bottle in my case.

And then there is the choice of liquor.

Venturing into wilderness areas in any part of Australia means you are totally responsible for your rubbish. There are no bins or refuse removal systems so what you carry in you have to carry out.

Glass is heavy and breakable (imagine carrying a glass bottle of wine in your pack for three to four days and breaking it on the last night) and so we tend to take stronger tipples rather than normal wine.

My walking colleagues were

Rutherglen vigneron and so their choice was tokay, which was certainly a great match with the post-dinner cup of coffee.

Malt whisky is my usual walking sipper. It's strong and can be blended with a teaspoon or so of beautiful Tasmanian lake or river water (in our case the Franklin River) to both make the whisky go further and to also release its wonderful aromas and flavours.

After setting up camp, we sit around preparing our evening meals and this is the time we enjoy a tipple and discuss the triumphs of the day and the challenges that tomorrow may present.

There is something special about sitting on the banks of the Franklin River, without any noise for miles around sipping a humble plastic cup of malt whisky from the Western Isles of Scotland and contemplating the amazing solitude and beauty of such a special place which came within a hair's breadth of being inundated under a dam's-worth of hydro water.

Highly privileged and very special.

grape expectations

with max crus



Nicer legs than spiders

SPIDERS are fabulous creatures, aren't they?

They clean up flies and mozzies and other creepy crawlies and generally do their bit for the local ecology at your house, and in that ecologically friendly way too.

Mum and Dad tried to calm our fears by saying that spiders are more scared of you than you of them, a standpoint pretty hard to support when you see someone jumping round the kitchen like they just scored a goal in the World Cup except they're screaming something about how they "nearly touched it, nearly touched it, nearly touched it", while the spider is sitting calmly beside the kettle from whence he came, wondering what to do next, and completely unaware that the full force of the household insecticidal arsenal is about to be unleashed as soon as the grand mal subsides.

Why would they do that? Why would they hide behind the most commonly used implements or doors if they are scared of us?



And you never know which it is of course, it's Spider Roulette.

Actually, there is nothing irrational about the fear of spiders at all, they are simply very scary hairy little buggers, although Ricardo's reaction to his latest creepy encounter could hardly be described as rational.

Here's a man who will play with snakes all day, even put them around his neck to show off, will climb sheer cliff faces with the barest of tackle and a broad smile, but who recently refused to enter a

room in which a moderately-sized huntsman was basking at eye level.

Amazingly, there is a parallel to arachnophobia in the wine world — chardophobia, the irrational fear of chardonnay.

Sure there's a few that put hairs on your chest, hardly reason to shun the remainder as if they were Brazilian bird-eaters, but you ask anyone if they'd like a chardy and the response is usually "do I look like someone who likes spiders?"

Well, get over it because you'll never get over your fear of spiders.



**Provenance Geelong Chardonnay 2005, \$27.**

Sometimes you forget how pleasant a chardonnay can be. They are not all heavy going and this one proves the point admirably. — 8.3/10

**Protero 2006 Chardonnay \$22-\$25.**

Sensible enough chardonnay from Gumeracha in SA, that clever types may identify as between WA and Yarra Valley, which is about right. — 8.4/10

**McHenry Hohnen 2007 Calgardup Brook Chardonnay Margaret River \$37.**

You can just tell at least \$37 worth of effort has gone into this wine, but it tastes like a \$40 wine at least. — 8.8/10

**Millamolong of Orange 26 Ponies Chardonnay 2006, \$20.**

About 26 ponies would be enough for anyone you would think, without moving on to chardonnay to finish the job. Good food wine when you feel like you could eat a horse. — 8.3/10

**Crittenden Mornington Peninsula Chardonnay, 2005, \$30.**

Not your normal 40-degree day stuff, so just keep the water up as well. Posh produce from the Peninsula. — 8.6/10

Can you pull a pot of gold?

DOWNING a cleansing ale or two with your mates is one of our favourite national pastimes — indeed ad man John Singleton once declared it was "un-Australian to drive past a pub".

But when's the last time you gave a thought to the people pouring the beverage? And who would have guessed there's a sport behind it?

In fact, beer pouring is a serious competitive endeavour — and there's nothing new about it.

For hundreds of years in Europe, the pouring and presentation of beer has been just as important as that of food.

The fine art of pulling a beer was put on show in Sydney this week when Australia's top pourers gathered to compete in the national final of the Draught Masters competition.

"We live in such a warm climate, we tend to drink beer pretty quick, its not so much about the time and taste rather the quenching of thirst," says former Australian Draught Master Mark Stanley.

But according to the Queenslander, things are changing Down Under.

"We're trying to educate everyone, and I think slowly, as we have done with wine, people will ... have appreciation for the art behind the bar," Stanley says.

NINE STEPS TO PULLING THE PERFECT BEER

1. PURIFICATION

The glass should release the beer's flavour and aroma. It should be cleaned with a non-fat-based detergent then rinsed with cold water, allowing the glass to reach the same temperature as the beer.

2. SACRIFICE

The bartender opens the tap in one swift motion to let the first burst of foam flow away. It must never enter the glass, ensuring that every drop of beer is fresh.

3. LIQUID ALCHEMY

The glass should be held at a 45-degree angle. When the beer hits the glass and begins to circulate, it should create the ideal proportion of foam to liquid.

4. THE HEAD

The natural creation of the foam head occurs by straightening and lowering the glass. This initial foam is important as it prevents the beer from coming into contact with the air and losing any flavour.

5. THE TWO FINGER RULE

The right amount of foam is about two fingers (3cm) thick. The final head creates a protective cap that keeps your beer from going stale.

6. THE REMOVAL

The bartender closes the tap in one quick action and moves the glass away to prevent any drops from falling into the glass. If they do, they will come in contact with the air and oxidise, making them unworthy of your glass.

7. THE BEHEADING

While the head is flowing over the edge of the glass, it should be cut gently with a knife on a 45-degree angle. This eliminates the larger bubbles, which burst easily and accelerate the dissipation of the head.

8. THE CLEANSING

The bartender rinses the bottom and sides of the glass. This step keeps the outside of glass clean and comfortable to hold.

9. THE BESTOWAL

Finally, the beer is served on a coaster, accompanied by a drip catcher at the base. Behold, the perfect glass Cheers.