



## Melbourne pre-tour temptations **Victorian wines: from full-bodied to sparkling**

By Sandra de Pury, *Victoria*

Melbourne was founded in 1835, and high quality wines have been made in Victoria since those early days. The initial vineyards were planted within reach of the capital city Melbourne, and then extended to central and northern Victoria following the gold rush in 1851. Phylloxera spread across the state from 1875, leaving few areas unscathed. This, with changing tastes and economic problems, led to a state-wide decline in wine production.

But since the 1960s, the Victorian wine industry has gone from strength to strength, with high quality plantings, careful exploration of micro-climates and booming wine tourism. Today Victoria has over 700 wine producers, the majority of which have cellar doors where one can taste wines at no cost.

The state is divided into six zones:

**NorthWest Victoria** along the great Murray River has a warm-hot climate and produces large volumes of grapes mostly destined for lower cost wines.

**Western Victoria** was established as a wine area in the 1860s and is most well known for red wines, especially full-bodied but refined shiraz. Fine examples come from *Bests* and *Mount Langhi Ghiran* in the Grampians area and *Dalwhinnie* in the Pyrenees area. In the cooler southwest, one can find age-worthy Riesling (*Crawford River*) and cabernet.

**Central Victoria** is a large area including the gold rush town of Bendigo. It produces robust and tannic red wines and long-lived Marsanne from the Goulburn Valley (*Mitchelton* and *Château Tahbilk*) and velvety, concentrated shiraz from Heathcote (*Jasper Hill*).



*Yeringberg Vineyards.*

**NorthEast Victoria** includes the high-altitude Alpine valleys where fine and delicate sparkling wine, chardonnay, gewürztraminer and Riesling flourish. *Giaconda* in Beechworth is well known for its powerful yet tightly-wound chardonnay. It also includes the warmer and historic Rutherglen area which is world famous for two uniquely Australian fortified wines: muscat (made from muscat a petit grains) and tokay/topaque (made from muscadelle).

**Gippsland** is the most remote Victorian wine area, with a plethora of small family run wineries. The best known is *Bass Phillip* which produces a sublime pinot noir.

### **Port Phillip**

This zone includes the vineyards planted all around Port Phillip Bay and the capital city Melbourne. The Yarra Valley, Sunbury, Macedon Ranges, Geelong and Mornington Peninsula regions all produce premium wines from cool climate sites and are influenced to different extents by the maritime environment.

Yarra Valley (35 miles to the east of Melbourne) has a long and proud history, and boasts of having the first grapes in the state planted in 1837. It is famous for refined chardonnay, pinot noir as well as long-lived elegant cabernets and shiraz from the warmer sites. *Yeringberg*, *Mount Mary* and *Yarra Yering* all produce outstanding wines.

Macedon Ranges to the north of Melbourne is more recently established and produces stunning sparkling wines, chardonnay and pinot noir. It is one of the coolest wine regions in Australia. *Bindi* and *Curly Flat* produce especially fine chardonnay and pinot noir.

The Mornington Peninsula is an easy drive southwest of Melbourne. It is a beautiful coastal region with over 50 cellar doors, stunning vistas and charming beaches. The main varieties are pinot noir, chardonnay and pinot gris.

Margaret River, on the extreme opposite side of Australia, has a great rivalry with the Victorian wine industry. The maritime climate produces outstanding chardonnay and cabernet, and the grand cellars of Margaret River doors have had no expense spared.



*Curly Flat Vineyards.*