

Tasting notes for those soft wines of Cowra

As reported last week, Cowra's wine output has halved as demand for its grapes evaporated. In response, a dozen independent growers formed Cowra Winemakers to promote the area's soft, fruity, easy-drinking, inexpensive wines.

By joining together, the vignerons hope to spread the regional message, tough in a crowded market, but they have the advantage of making realistically priced, soft, easy-to-drink wines that don't need cellaring. These are my impressions of the wines offered on the group's road trip to Canberra.

Rosnay Sparkling Rose 2009, \$23

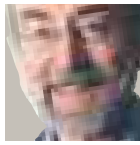
A tank-fermented blend of shiraz and mourvedre from the Statham family's organic vineyard. Light, bright pink colour with matching vibrant strawberry-like aroma and flavour, finishing crisp and dry. Very good and refreshing enough, but I don't understand why anyone would choose to drink rose.

Toms Waterhole Semillon 2008, \$18

A very pale-coloured bone-dry white with just 10.5 per cent alcohol and therefore very light bodied. To me, it lacks fruit flavour and there's something peculiar in the aroma and flavour.

wine

Chris Shanahan



The Mill Verdelho, \$17.99

This comes from David and Elizabeth O'Dea's extensive Windowrie estate and is a terrific example of what Cowra does best. It's vibrant, aromatic in a lovely musky way, and the palate's juicy, soft and refreshing.

River Park Rose 2009, \$19

Apparently made from cabernet, although to me it tastes simple and lolly-like.

Kalari Cowra Chardonnay 2008, \$17

This gold-medal winner from the Cowra show delivers a great juicy mouthful of ripe, peachy chardonnay flavour with additions derived from oak fermentation and maturation. A very pleasant drop and best enjoyed while young.

Cowra Estate Merlot 2007, \$18

This medium-bodied merlot has the

bright, appealing fragrance of cabernet franc, not merlot. That's not surprising as much of the merlot planted in Australia 20 years ago turned out to be cabernet franc. This is probably a blend of the two and is very appealing as an easy-drinking red.

Pig in the House Shiraz 2008, \$25

Jason O'Dea, son of David and Elizabeth O'Dea, produces this at his own small organic vineyard. A delightful, pure expression of shiraz, very much in Cowra's drink-me-now mould.

Mulyan Bloc 9 Shiraz Viognier 2007, \$25

This more weighty, chunky red comes from the Fagan family's Mulyan vineyard and is made by Frenchman Chris Derez at Orange. It's full and round with loads of soft tannins and alcoholic warmth. Mulyan makes some of the area's best chardonnays (not featured at this tasting).

Swinging Bridge Shiraz 2008, \$19.95

The most complex of the shirazes in the tasting, albeit in the soft, drink-now style. Not quite as fleshy as the others, it has an appealing savouriness and there's a real red grip to the finish. Made by Chris Derez.

Gardners Ground Canowindra Shiraz 2008, \$19.95

This was another complex red and unexpectedly peppery and spicy for a shiraz from such a warm area. Has a lovely fragrance and fine, taut structure.

Spring Ridge Cowra Cabernet Sauvignon 2008, \$19

Spring Ridge belongs to Peter and Anne Jeffery. Peter Jeffrey says the fruit came from a small section at the top of his vineyard, about 350m above sea level. It offers pure, sweet, ripe cabernet varietal character without any of the lean, green flavours of a lot of inland cab savs. It has cabernet structure too: not too fleshy, but not mean, finishing dry with a distinct tannin bite.

Wallington Petit Verdot 2004 \$20

Petit verdot is a useful blending variety in Bordeaux, but a number of Australian makers offer it solo. I tried very hard to like this wine but, alas, found little to enjoy.

■ www.winesofcowra.com.au If you visit Cowra, Neila Restaurant (www.neila.com.au) is a must.

Beer now as foodie as wine

It's time to think beyond peanuts when downing your beer, **Elizabeth Bellamy** writes

Once the province of wine connoisseurs, the concept of pairing food with beer is growing in popularity as the drinking public looks for more than just a supermarket slab and a packet of beer nuts.

Brewing consultant and brewer for Newcastle's Fusion, Brian Watson says he, brewer Chuck Hahn (now with microbrewer Malt Shovel Brewery) and other industry stalwarts have been on a mission to persuade drinkers to see beer as a food drink, and as more than just a "drink that you throw down your throat".

Fusion has gone further than most, developing its beers with specific dishes in mind. The Newcastle brewer launched Bluebottle in 2007 to complement seafood. Firefly followed a year later, for spicy and Asian flavours. A third brew,

a darker beer for red meat, will be unveiled at this weekend's National Capital Craft Beer Festival in Canberra, ahead of a national launch next month.

Traditionally, beer has gone well with deep-fried dishes, Asian cuisines, chocolate desserts and seafood.

So when making Bluebottle, Watson, Fusion's food consultant Matthew Evans (the former chef and food critic) and others sat down to a "seafood feast" and spread of beers to identify the key flavours of the food and the drinking characteristics that enhanced them.

"The problem with seafood is that beer often overpowers it," Watson says. "You want something that's complementary, contrasting and cleansing." So Fusion went with a brew that used aromatic American hops, German yeast,



Fusion brewer Brian Watson.

Australian barley and purified water. Fresh lemon juice was added during the filtration process (unusual in Australian brewing, Watson says) for balance.

Firefly is made with saartz hops for a fruity flavour, and is middle-of-the-road bitter so it won't compete with a dish's heat, with a fine bead carbonation added to take the edge off highly spiced or chilli flavours. "The best beverage to have with spicy food is beer. The high alcohol content of wine doesn't lend itself to spicy food," Watson says.

The brewer, who started his 20-year career with Heineken in New Zealand and now advises new breweries, says working with a chef is a new experience.

Typically, beers are designed after focus groups or marketing feedback or on a brewer's whim. "It was a challenge to convert layman's terms to brewing expertise. It created a different perspective."

Sydney's Lord Nelson Brewery in the Rocks has been brewing on site for 25 years and hosting annual beer dinners for 12. While the results haven't been intentional, several of its products have evolved to sit well with food.

Brewery manager Trystam Hayden says the Three Sheets pale ale, with overtones of herbaceous hops characters and citrus aromas, is good with seafood and Asian dishes, while the Old Admiral – a dark and full-bodied malt-driven ale – sits well with chocolate and hard Italian cheeses.

The Lord Nelson brasserie menu features an Old Admiral ice cream and usually has at least one dish with beer as an ingredient.

While Watson says the industry has been slow to embrace the concept of beer and food matching, the public has been more welcoming.

Hayden's sales staff regularly speak with sommeliers, and Sydney's three-hatted Bilson's Restaurant now features Three Sheets in a dish

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