

Wine

BY PETER FORRESTAL

Liquidity

Pedigree and price add up to a selection straight off the top shelf.

THE ENGLISH WINE MERCHANT PIERS Methuen recently hosted a small but lavish dinner at Tetsuya's in Sydney to show the range of wines to which he has access ('61 clarets, '47 Vieux Chateau Certan, '78 DRC Richebourg, '85 La Mouline, '27 Cockburn, that kind of thing). The sole Aussie pretender was the magnificent 1967 Penfolds Bin 7, which shone even in the brightest company.

Since the 1990s, the rise to prominence of cult wines - that attracted the attention of influential US wine writer Robert Parker - has affected the top of the market. This selection takes into account initial release price, auction price and pedigree.

The desire to own Penfolds Grange at any price has softened in recent times. The scarcity of the quite ordinary 1957 and 1958 Granges forced the price per bottle to between \$10,000 and \$13,000, although the better 1955 vintage can be picked up for about \$3000. For vintages from the 1960s onwards expect to pay not much more than the current retail price. The stellar 1971 vintage should be available for less than \$700.

The top ten ...

**BASS PHILLIP RESERVE
PINOT NOIR (\$200+)**

Phillip Jones wrings our best pinot from a cold, wet, close-planted Gippsland site using minimal intervention. Made in minute quantities, the Reserve is ethereal, delicate, complex, velvety and improbably long.

**CULLEN "DIANA MADELINE"
CABERNET MERLOT (\$90)**

Vanya Cullen's rigorous experimentation and attention to detail in the vineyard since 1989 have produced an incomparable red blend that has power, complexity, finesse and a stunning velvety texture.

GIACONDA CHARDONNAY (\$110)

Since 1986, Rick Kinzbrunner has fashioned a great, long-lived chardonnay from his single-vineyard site in once unfashionable Beechworth: it shows flinty minerality, mouth-watering balance, complexity and finesse, creamy texture and a multi-layered, dry finish.

**HENSCHKE "HILL OF GRACE"
(\$450)**

Australia's most famous single-vineyard shiraz with vines dating from the 1860s and a heritage extending back to 1958. Immeasurably improved by Stephen and Prue Henschke:

power and opulence harnessed by elegance and balance.

**LEEUWIN ESTATE "ART SERIES"
CHARDONNAY (\$91)**

Bob Cartwright (winemaker) and John Brocksopp (viticul-turist) established Margaret River's reputation for peerless chardonnay with this fine, age-worthy white: bright primary fruits, savoury minerality and seamless cedary oak balance its power and complexity.

**MOSS WOOD CABERNET
SAUVIGNON (\$95)**

Keith Mugford has made the most of an ideal vineyard site in the heart of Wilyabrup and continues to refine this superb cabernet: fragrant, deeply flavoured, seductively textured, balanced, fine and long.

MOUNT MARY "QUINTET" (\$85)

A single-vineyard Yarra cabernet blend that took its inspiration from the late John Middleton and revelled in its unfashionably low alcohol, elegance, finesse and seamlessly integrated deep-set fruit flavours and subtle oak.

PENFOLDS "GRANGE" (\$450+)

Max Schubert's legacy to the Australian wine industry has been refined by its recent custodians yet remains recognisably the wine that Max made. Complex, ultra-concentrated, hauntingly pure, unimaginably powerful, this demands to be drunk with reasonable age.

**TORBRECK "RUNRIG" SHIRAZ
(\$230)**

With only a decade's history, RunRig is a monumental, dry-grown, old-vine shiraz that is deeply flavoured, lavishly oaked and highly alcoholic and has achieved cult status on the American market. It's more readily available here than most cult wines.

**SEPPELT 100 YEAR OLD
VINTAGE LIQUEUR TAWNY
(\$1055)**

Benno Seppelt's far-sighted decision in 1878 enables the annual release of a 100-year-old fortified. The wines are awesome in their power and density of flavour with lush syrupy treacle, toffee, molasses flavours lasting forever. ●



