

# Excellence à la Giaconda

Philip Rich

Rick Kinzbrunner's chardonnay remains the closest thing to great white burgundy made outside France. Part II of a survey of the wines of Beechworth suggests his Warner Vineyard shiraz has everything it takes to become a new Australian classic

**E**ACH NOVEMBER for the last five years Rick Kinzbrunner (of Giaconda), Russell Branton (his friend and long-time marketing manager) and myself have a lunch at which the winemaker presents all of his just-about-to-be-released wines out of small Grolsch swing-top beer bottles.

In what might seem a big call (considering the number of superb wines Kinzbrunner has made at his modest Beechworth winery over the last few years), I am able to say that the 2002 Giacondas are, unequivocally, the best wines I have ever tasted from one of Australia's most low-key winemakers. Even the laconic Kinzbrunner, the winner of last

year's Qantas/*Australian Gourmet Traveller* WINE Winemaker of the Year award, describes his 2002 vintage as the best since 1992. The main difference between them, he says, is that he "didn't really know what [he] was doing back then".

He clearly does nowadays; as both winemaker and viticulturist he is in complete control and making some of the most compelling wines in Australia. The chardonnay, originally planted in 1982 on what has turned out to be a superb south-facing site – it was chosen as much by luck as design – continues to grow in stature, remaining the closest thing to great white burgundy made outside Burgundy itself. One can only imagine what Kinzbrunner would do given a tonne of Le Montrachet or Corton-Charlemagne.

Just as exciting is the quality of Giaconda shiraz made from the

fruit of a vineyard planted in 1995 by local farmer Graeme Warner at Kinzbrunner's urging. While the 2001 (only the third shiraz he has made) was a superb wine – I included it in my Top 20 wines of 2003 – the 2002 is in another league.

These are wines that do not just rate among the best in Australia; they are as good as anything being made anywhere in the world. And while they remain difficult to find, the rewards for doing so are greater than ever.

The following were retasted in January after bottling (the cabernet excepted) and, while the wines reviewed are sold off the mailing list, you may find some at Armadale Cellars in Melbourne (03 9509 3055) or Five Way Cellars in Sydney (02 9360 4242). To go onto the mailing list for future releases go to [www.giaconda.com.au](http://www.giaconda.com.au). ■



Heaven's above... The Giaconda vineyard (above) has delivered the goods again with its dazzling 2002 vintage. This small, low-tech vineyard and winery is some 400 metres above sea level, and combines an ideal site with a passionate winemaking ethos.



JAMES DAVIES '03

## Chardonnay 2002

**THE LATEST** in a succession of brilliant chardonnays, this may even surpass the 1996 for complexity and longevity. A multitude of aromas soar from the glass, including the usual array of charcuterie, grilled cashew and hazelnuts, honey and vanilla from French oak (50 per cent was new). The palate is complex, powerful and textured, while the acidity will provide enough structure and backbone to ensure that this will still be drinking superbly in another 10 years.

## Pinot Noir 2002

**MADE FROM** vines that yielded around 30 hectolitres per hectare, this is perfumed with aromas of dark berries, spices such as cinnamon and nutmeg, and a hint of stalks (10 per cent stems were added to the ferment). As with all these releases, the oak has been totally swallowed up by the sheer concentration of fruit. The palate is ripe, long and structured; firm, yet silky tannins provide superb mouthfeel. This should age gracefully over the next six to eight years.

## Warner Vineyard Shiraz 2002

**A SATURATED** deep purple in colour, the aromas of dark fruits, licorice, earth, freshly hung meat, and cedar from 65 per cent new French oak lead onto a palate that is very concentrated, ripe (yet not remotely jammy or heavy), dry and a touch savoury. The firm, ripe tannins are masked by the sheer weight of fruit concentration, and despite a small amount of co-fermented roussanne in the blend, this looks more like top-flight Hermitage than Côte-Rôtie.

## TRAVELLING NORTH

**I CAME TO** Brisbane to taste Queensland wine with as many prejudices as I could pack. I had never tasted a good one. And probably because Queensland has marketed its tropical fruits so successfully, it just didn't seem right that they could grow grapes in the same climate. But, as I have learned, Queensland wine is not all the same.

During my recent stint as a guest judge at *The Courier-Mail*

Sheraton Brisbane Queensland Wine Awards I discovered that Queensland was producing some really impressive and eminently drinkable wines – very few of which are made from chardonnay.

The varieties that are looking good here are verdelho and semillon in the whites – with one very good viognier from Casley Mount Hutton Winery suggesting potential in this area – and shiraz, cabernet and merlot in the reds. Chambourcin is fairly widely

planted and makes pretty good fortified and, I am assured, a quite splendid jam!

Robert Channon Wines produced the best white wine of the show – the 2003 Verdelho; and the Stanthorpe Wine Company's Summit Estate Reserve Shiraz won best red wine of the show. Both wineries are located in the unusually high and cool Granite Belt – around a three-hour drive south-west of Brisbane. For the day-tripping wine tourist, I must

also recommend Sirromet at Mount Cotton – an hour's drive from Brisbane in the Gold Coast hinterland. The drive up Mount Tamborine is gorgeous enough, but there are tourist attractions galore hereabouts as well.

The historic Auchenflower House, once the social centre of Brisbane, has been relocated to Albert River Wines to provide an impressive cellar door run by the energetic and highly professional David and Janette Bladin.

From talking to local wine professionals in Brisbane, it seems that prejudices against the local drop are strongest closest to home – the Queensland wine industry is having to work very hard to prove these doubters wrong. Well, they convinced me: of 308 wines entered in the show in 2003, there were 78 medals awarded: six gold, 16 silver and 56 bronze. Mangos one day, verdelho the next!

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