



Qantas/Australian Gourmet Traveller WINE

WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR 2003

Congratulations to **Rick Kinzbrunner**, this year's Australian Winemaker of the Year

AT A TIME when expansion is the catchcry of the Australian wine industry, this year's winner of the Qantas/Australian Gourmet Traveller WINE Winemaker of the Year, Rick Kinzbrunner, is concerned that he may have too many grapes. What fires him is a desire to refine the wines he is making. Kinzbrunner is pondering the possibility that the tiny 2000-case production of Gioconda is too large for him to give the vineyard the attention he wants. In thinking about the possibility of downsizing, Kinzbrunner is swimming against the business tide. Not that this would cause a moment's pause for this serious, self-contained and driven winemaker. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Qantas, this magazine is once again able to tell the stories of the winemakers whose expertise, experience and dedication has enabled the Australian industry to export wine in great volume (worth more than \$2 billion a year to the local economy) as well as producing tiny amounts of idiosyncratic, world-class wines that have won the respect of aficionados everywhere. In the past six years, we have acknowledged the contribution of 50 individual winemakers to this world-leading industry. Previous winners have come from both large companies – Philip Shaw (Rosemount) and Phil Laffer (Orlando Wyndham) – and, depending on your definition, small wineries – Jeffrey Gosset (Grosset, 8000 cases), Vanya Cullen (Cullen, 18,000 cases) and Gary Farr (Barnockburn, 8000 cases). But Kinzbrunner's Gioconda (2000 cases) is tiny rather than small. In finding a winner, the judges – myself, Peter Forrestal (chairman), Peter Bourne, Nick Bullied MW, Huon Hooke, Sophie Otton and Kayte Nunn – focus on the quality of the wines the nominees have made in the recent past. This year's finalists – Larry Cherubino (Houghton), Michael Kerrigan (Howard Park), Kinzbrunner,



Tim Kirk (Clonakilla), Trevor Mast (Mount Lang Ghiran), Robert O'Callaghan and Chris Ringland (Rockford), Andrew Pirie (formerly of Pipers Brook and now with Parker Estate) and Kerri Thompson (Leasingham) – are an impressive group by any standards. Their stories, published in the past two issues of AGT WINE, give a sense of the person and hint at the qualities that underlie their pursuit of excellence in the vineyard and winery. Kinzbrunner was a Winemaker of the Year finalist in 1999. At the time, his Gioconda chardonnay was regarded as at, or close to, the pinnacle for this variety in Australia; several of his pinot noirs had also been outstanding and his cabernet sauvignon had a strong following. What has so impressed this year's judges is the work that Kinzbrunner has done since then, creating three new wines and refining those

already established. The Gioconda Nantua vineyard (5km from the home property) is producing roussanne for the Aeola and fruit for the Nantua Les Deux blend of chardonnay and roussanne. Both are stylish whites showing complex barrel-fermentation and lees-contact characters. Gioconda Warner Vineyard shiraz has been added to the portfolio, using fruit from neighbour Graeme Warner's vineyard. In its most recent vintage (2001), it is plump, fleshy and elegant with underlying ripeness and power. The Gioconda chardonnay is at least as good as it has ever been: deep, viscous, mineral, with powerful savoury flavours and wonderful integration of fruit and oak. The pinot noir appears more consistent, with the 2001 the best to come from the vineyard: a stunningly intense, silky textured wine with thyme and wild strawberry flavours – a deep and satisfying drink. The Gioconda cabernet sauvignon appears to have developed greater richness, ripeness and complexity than before and is wonderfully smooth and fine. Kinzbrunner has made wine in France, California and New Zealand, travels regularly, and often drinks the great wines of the world. He understands the benchmarks and knows what it takes to produce great wines at (formerly unfashionable) Beechworth in north-eastern Victoria. For him, the secret is usually more work in the vineyard. Amazingly, he is pretty much a one-man operation. As fellow judge Huon Hooke says, "He is the owner, founder, winemaker, vineyard manager, style council and spiritual guide of Gioconda". Kinzbrunner's wines are not cheap, nor are they readily available. Specialist retailers and classy restaurants offer your best opportunity to find them. They will be well worth the hunt – so that you can salute the 2003 Australian Winemaker of the Year in the most appropriate fashion. ■