

## WINE MATTERS

## The odd ones are in

SAUVIGNON blanc and pinot gris. Together those varieties have become the bane of many a sommelier, some winemakers and the occasional wine writer's existence. There's nothing inherently wrong with them; gosh, put Marlborough in front of the first variety and you have the most popular white on the market. The problem is, too many are poorly made, and pinot gris (or grigio) can taste diluted, while some sauvignon blanc is just too similar and lacklustre — taste one Marlborough sauv blanc, taste them all. Now before anyone shoots the messenger, I'm not pitting wine professionals, even the snobby ones, against the hoi polloi. The point is sauvignon blanc and pinot gris are like a Granny Smith or Jonathan when there are many more delicious apples to eat. Diversity is one of the most exciting elements in wine; it needs to be fostered and encouraged. Why? Apart from sustainability issues, it thwarts the boring and creates more exciting drinking for everyone.

All week, there's been a celebration of the heterogeneous in Mildura, where the 10th anniversary of the Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show has been in full swing. The show started out as a sangiovese challenge, with just 60 examples, and is now a proper show embracing more than 600 wines. It

culminates today with a long lunch prepared by Stefano de Pieri, one of the show's co-founders, together with Bruce Chalmers, who dedicated much of his working life to importing alternative varieties; the other founder was the late Dr Rod Bonfiglioli, a young plant scientist who persuaded them to do the show. All in their own way have helped encourage diversity in this country through promoting alternative varieties such as tempranillo, sangiovese, vermentino, fiano, and so on — the list is long. It's also a tribute today as the trophy for best wine of show has been renamed after Bonfiglioli, who died in May from cancer.

What is exciting now is that these so-called alternative varieties are deservedly seeping into the mainstream. At the Adelaide Wine Show a few weeks ago, the Yalumba Running With Bulls tempranillo (see tasting note) took out the best other red varietal trophy, but more tellingly just missed out on winning the top red trophy. To my knowledge, that has never happened before in an Australian wine show. Ten years ago tempranillo was difficult to pronounce and barely a feature in Australian vineyards; two days ago, Chalmers Wine released Australia's first nero d'Avola. Welcome to the future.

**JANE FAULKNER**

\* Jane Faulkner judged at the Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show.

**YALUMBA RUNNING WITH BULLS TEMPRANILLO 2008 \$19**

An outstanding Australian tempranillo, with its core of tangy fruit, that distinct maraschino cherry note and mulberries but not a fruit bomb — hallelujah! With a whiff of dried Mediterranean herbs, savoury with soft, plush, sweetish tannins tempered by tangy acidity and terrific length; a fabulous drink.



**VILLA ANGELA PECORINO VELENOSI 2008 \$24**

Just love this wine from the Marche region of Italy, with its tingly, zesty citrus character, distinct white floral note, touch of juniper and dried herbs plus that lovely sea-salty note adding a savoury element to pecorino. It's refreshing and tangy on the palate — a fantastic wine to match with antipasto and seafood. The only bummer is that it's under a synthetic closure, so best to drink this fresh and young, which is right now.



**GREENSTONE SANGIOVESE 2007 \$63**

There's no other Australian sangiovese quite like this, for Greenstone manages to meld a gorgeous perfume with a structured palate without the wine being heavy or awkward. It's essentially a savoury wine, but there's some delicate fruit underneath; cherry, plums with some dried herbs, earthy with fine dusty Italianate tannins and cleansing acidity. Some will balk at the price but Greenstone has taken the quality of local sangiovese up several notches. Superb stuff.

