



AUSTRENAISSANCE

Australian Chardonnay takes over

THE WINE AND THEIR SCORES:

Giant Steps:

Wombat Creek 2019

96 Points

Sexton Vineyard 2019

95 Points

Shaw & Smith:

M3 2018 / M3 2019

96 Points* / 96 Points

Lenswood 2017 / Lenswood 2018

98 Points / 97 Points

Tolpuddle:

Coal River 2019

98 Points

Cullen:

Kevin John 2017 / 2018 / 2019

97 Points / 97 Points / 98 Points

***Denotes Gold Medal/Best in show**

CHARDONNAY: A LOVE LETTER

by Station to Station Wine

Chardonnay is a chameleon. Chardonnay is a warrior. Chardonnay is polarising. Chardonnay is mesmeric. It can be lean and harsh. It can be big, flabby and buttery. It likes oak. It like concrete or stainless steel. It likes altitude. It likes valleys. It loves food. It likes to be worked in the winery. It likes to be left alone. It goes into Champagne. It's found in the rainy Pacific North West and the surf breaks of Southern California. It's prolific in the marginal climates of Northern France. It's finding success as a niche variety in sun baked Tuscany and towards the boot of Italy. It likes fashion. It likes changing it's spots to suit consumer taste. It likes Australia. It likes the spotlight.

If you are not a fan of Chardonnay you just haven't met the right one yet. We're here to change that.



CHARDONNAY: THE GREAT JOURNEY

ABC refers to anything but Chardonnay, a common refrain from the 80's as a reaction to the over the top butter bombs that were circulating at the time . Chardy has always been polarising - it's not the sort of grape you will take or leave.

This is surprising given the grape is in lots of ways, quite middle of the road. It does not show overt acidity or perfume, two components I have often found to sway the consumer. It's great with food, great without, so why are so many people afraid of Chardoanny?



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You can always be pretty sure that you will get what you want or need out of a Pinot Grigio. Pinot Grigio is just Pinot Gris, except it is picked earlier before the fruit has achieved full ripeness. In place of ripeness when you pick earlier is freshness/acidity. You can make Pinot Grigio anywhere and done properly you can expect that lean body and racy acidity. It can be made very cheaply and to be honest it's pretty hard to fuck it up.

Chardonnay you can grow everywhere too, and while the textbook would suggest it is easy to grow, that is in a sense that you probably won't blind anyone with the resulting wine. To make a really good and inexpensive Chardonnay is very difficult.

Chardonnay is distinctive in its body, naturally quite rich and buttery, it has a lot more texture than Sauv. B or Pinot G. While the other two will ripple around the palate and vanish, Chardy sticks. Sauv and Grigio can be smashed by the litre over lunch, with or without food, Chardy demands time and attention. (That said, I would drink good Chardy faster than the others).

What really makes Chardonnay so polarising is not its weight, flavour or fashion, it is that you never know what you are going to get (like a box of chocolates). Highly reactive to terroir, it looks different wherever it is grown. Unlike Riesling, which you grow, crush and bottle, Chardy is highly receptive to different winemaking methods.

The normal wine hacks apply to some extent if you want work out what it's like. Look at the alcohol content or the region where it's grown to get some idea of the style of the wine (low alcohol/cool climate will generally be a leaner style, high alcohol/warm climate will generally be a riper style). But winemaking methods such as batonnage and malolactic fermentatation (wine making methods far too boring to go into here) will greatly impact the soul of the wine. The number one rule of Chardonnay is that if it's under a tenner, chances are it's only worth that much. If that.

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Never with Chardonnay is the old adage **producer, producer, producer** more important. Truth is, it is expensive, difficult or time consuming (and often all three) to make a good Chardonnay, so lesser wine makers don't tend to bother, or at least don't tend to bother putting much effort into it - this marks the journey of Australian chardonnay.

Fashion has always been key to Chardonnay and in the past the over worked, oaky, buttery style was in vogue. Australian Chardonnay lived and died by the bigger is better philosophy. Extraction, oak and ripeness was key and producers such as Rosemont in South Australia became famous for the butterball, a bottle of wine that seemed to bare more resemblance to a tin of pineapple juice than grape juice. Riesling took over as consumers looked for more of a pure fruit expression in their white wine.

Steve Flamsteed of (at the time) Innocent Bystander and Giant Steps, Vanya Cullen, the undisputed Queen of Western Australian (or more appropriately Australian) wine making and the upstart Shaw & Smith winery helmed by Micheal Hill Smith were some of the real movers in the Chardonnay phenomenon.

There was no great war, only a great depression. The fruit, terroir and expertise were all there. There was no great eureka moment nor turning point. Fashion was once again the driving factor, only this time it was driven by the winemakers and their love of the great Burgundian styles of Chardonnay that drove this renaissance. It certainly didnt hurt that great sites and matured during the race to the bottom. Driven in the Yarra Valley in particular, a neo classic expression of Chardonnay emerged as the great wine makers started to produce a new style of Australian Chardy that spoke to it's place and focused less on wine making.

The wine press was quick to jump on board. James Halliday, the main Aussie wine writer unveiled the James Halliday Chardonnay challenge, and Chardonnay suddenly found itself back o top, only this time it was for all of the right reasons.

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The wines in this offer do not tell the whole story of Australian Chardy, far from it. Younger wine makers like Simon Steele at Medhurst and Chris Coulter in South Australia are making terroir-driven Aussie Chardys that offer balance, poise and drinkability without being too lean or too heavy. XXXX at Nocturn in WA is making a rich bit pure style without veering into parody.

During the (online of course) tasting of these wines, one question was posed to the wine makers about residual sugar as they thought the wines seemed sweet. I think Michael Hill Smith was going to snatch the life straight out of them. The truth is that modern Auuie Chardonnay shows a softness and lack of austerity that som may mistake for sweetness, but they are dry as a bone. What you are tasting is the soft purity of modern Australian Chardonnay, and these guys are as good as it gets.

GIANT STEPS, YARRA VALLEY

In 1997 Phil Sexton arrived in the Yarra Valley in search of altitude, aged soils, slopes of exposure, regular rainfall and cool to cold night time temperatures and a gentle breeze off the protecting mountain ranges. Why, because he wanted to grow amazing Chardonnay and Pinot Noir fruit to make wines of purity and finesse. Steve Flamsteed, Chief Winemaker of Giant Steps since 2003 has set about creating a range of Single Vineyard wines that personify each site. The Yarra Valley Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were then created, clearly displaying the Yarra Valley fruit in a simple, textural and affordable light.

The Giant Steps wines have received global acclaim and established a strong reputation in restaurants and fine wine stores around the world. Since 2003 Giant Steps wines have collectively been awarded 34 trophies and over 100 gold medals at major international and domestic wine shows and has been named one of the Top 100 Wineries in the World by Wine & Spirits Magazine, US for each of the last six years.



A very attractive, succulent style with intense and energetic white-peach and lemon aromas and flavors. The drive and depth on the palate really impress here. Drink or hold. Screw cap. **95 POINTS, JAMES SUCKLING**

Identical vinification to its siblings, the intention to place all the emphasis on the site, including its micro-flora. A wine with substance and depth, and a (non-residual sugar) touch of fruit sweetness. I am confident that the individual personality of each sibling will express itself more and more over the next 2 years. **95 POINTS, JAMES HALLIDAY**

GIANT STEPS, YARRA VALLEY



Super fine aromas of limes and chamomile with hints of beeswax, apple pie crust, pears and white-almond paste. The palate has a very sleek, steely and resolute line of mouth watering fruit, cast in the lime and white-peach zone. Super fine and long. Wow! **96 POINTS, JAMES SUCKLING**

This was my favourite chardonnay of all the 2018 releases... It had the most je ne sais quoi. Scents of flint and wet slate, wet fern, green apple. Nice start, says something about restraint and minerality in its way. Crisp and cool in the palate, transparent, light but steely and assertive in texture and pristine. The wine develops some juiciness after time, green apple sort of feel, a touch peppery, saline, flinty finish maintains as a strength. A quiet power here, lots of character and architecture, and, importantly, sense of deliciousness and refreshment. Super individual and super. **95 POINTS, MIKE BENNIE, THE WINE FRONT**

SHAW & SMITH, ADELAIDE HILLS

Shaw + Smith was established in 1989 by cousins Michael Hill Smith MW and Martin Shaw. They make wines exclusively from the Adelaide Hills, from varieties that suit the cooler climate: Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Shiraz. Shaw + Smith own two vineyards, in Lenswood and Balhannah. Balhannah is also home to the winery where the Tasting Room is open daily.

Growing the best possible grapes, managing vineyards sustainably, and valuing vine health, soil health, and low yields are central to the Shaw + Smith approach. In the pursuit of quality, all grapes continue to be hand-picked, and the wines are fermented, aged and bottled on site at Balhannah. The wines are vibrant, medium bodied expressions of their varieties that reflect their sites and region.

Shaw + Smith own two vineyards in the Adelaide Hills, at Balhannah and Lenswood, totalling 55 hectares. The vineyards are planted to varieties that perform particularly well in the region, namely Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Shiraz. Site selection is particularly important in the Adelaide Hills, with its diversity of altitude, aspect, microclimate, and soil. We also use a number of different cultivars or 'clones' of each grape variety, which contribute different qualities to the final product.

Shaw + Smith's first vintage was in 1990, and the early vintages were made at Wirra Wirra and Petaluma. In 1999 they purchased a property at Balhannah, where they planted vines, and built the winery and tasting room in time for the 2000 vintage. In 2012 they purchased an established 20 hectare vineyard in Lenswood. As the business has grown Michael and Martin have built a formidable team to continue the evolution of Shaw + Smith, including Master of Wine David LeMire, Senior Winemaker Adam Wadewitz, Business Manager Grant Lovelock and Group Viticulturist Murray Leake.

SHAW & SMITH, ADELAIDE HILLS



Shaw + Smith M3 Chardonnay is a wine of note. It's a wine with a view, as in we all have one of it. It's come a long way over the years. I like my flint and funk but when I first opened this it was alarming. It was a matchbox factory. Some chardonnays need a decant and a wait. Give this time and it shows both power and poise, its grapefruit, custard apple and stone fruit flavours woven expertly with cedar, oatmeal, almond milk and matches. It has a quartz-like aspect, a bristle to its brilliance. It's narrow but it's not lean; there's more than enough power to its fruit. It should drink quite sensationally, from appropriate glassware, in another 2-4 years. **96 POINTS, THE WINE FRONT**



All four Bernard clones 76, 95, 96 and 277, then the usual winemaking techniques, but the quality of this wine is anything but usual. For the record, chilled overnight, whole-bunch pressed to new and used French puncheons. This is an utterly brilliant wine, elegant and intense, the fruit flavours reflecting the glorious vintage. **98 POINTS, James Halliday**

TOLPUDDLE VINEYARD, TASMANIA

"Tolpuddle Vineyard was established in 1988 and it took its name from the Tolpuddle Martyrs: English convicts transported to Tasmania for forming an agricultural union. The leader of the Martyrs, George Loveless, served some of his sentence working on a property near Richmond, part of which is now Tolpuddle Vineyard. The vineyard is planted with mature Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vines, facing north-east, and sloping gently up from Back Tea Tree Road. The soil is light silica over sandstone and of moderate vigour, ensuring well-balanced vines producing grapes of great flavour and intensity. In 2006 Tolpuddle Vineyard won the inaugural Tasmanian Vineyard of the Year award, reflecting the performance of this unique and distinguished site. Martin Shaw and Michael Hill Smith MW purchased the vineyard in 2011 and are fully committed to seeing Tolpuddle Vineyard recognised as one of Australia's great single vineyards.



"2020 Top 100 - "A strikingly beautiful chardonnay with its flowery bouquet bearing witness to the sheer purity of the incredibly long palate, the full palette of chardonnay flavours on display. Nectarine, white peach and grapefruit zest are sewn together by an invisible silver thread of acidity. **98 POINTS, JAMES HALLIDAY**

The filigree structure is a study in delicate balance between pure varietal character, site differentiation and winemaker vision. Lean and bony, its fruit is bound in a taut frame of citrus-tinged acidity, yet the finely drawn flavours show unusual intensity and persistence. Keep looking beyond the pastel sketch of white peach and lemon, and deep down there's struck flint, a hint of seasoned oak, a lick of wet granite – nothing overt, nothing that doesn't add to the sum of the parts. **97 POINTS, DECANTER MAGAZINE**

CULLEN, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

It's a great honour and privilege to be named the 2020 Halliday Wine Companion Winemaker of the Year. A heartfelt thanks to my team: Matthew Dermody in the vineyard, Andy Barrett-Lennard in the winery and everyone at Cullen Wines who has contributed to this, past and present.

I would like to thank James Halliday AM and his team Jane Faulkner, Jeni Port and Ned Goodwin MW for choosing me and the Cullen team as winners. It was such an incredible evening at the awards night to win both Winemaker of the Year and Varietal Winner of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Family with the 2017 Diana Madeline! Hardie Grant and the Halliday team hosted an amazing night, thank you. Thanks to my parents, Diana Madeline and Kevin John, and my family. A huge thank you to the Team at Cullens and the Cullen Wines board for all your hard work and support, I am very grateful! It is deeply pleasing to have this award representing quality wine made sustainably, I feel very blessed!

I feel very grateful and on top of the world, my feet haven't touched the ground yet. It has been a love story about the earth, nature, great wine, family, friends and colleagues. With 2019 marking my 30 years as Chief Winemaker milestone, to now receive this acknowledgment is simply wonderful, and exciting all at the same time!

Cheers!

Vanya

2020 HALLIDAY WINE COMPANION WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR

CULLEN, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

First established in 1971 by Dr Kevin and Diana Cullen, the winery has built an outstanding reputation for biodynamic wines that receive great acclaim.

Di and Kevin's youngest daughter Vanya, celebrated 30 years at the winemaking helm in 2019, and in the same year received double 'Winemaker of the Year' honours at both the Australian Women in Wine Awards and the Halliday Wine Companion Awards. During her tenure, she has worked tirelessly to develop the winery, first introducing organic farming in 1998 and then, in 2004, becoming a fully certified biodynamic estate.

True to its philosophy of 'Quality, Integrity and Sustainability', Cullen is the only carbon positive winery in the region, sequestering more carbon than they emit. All wines produced here are sourced from grapes grown on the Cullen and adjoining Mangan Vineyards in Wilyabrup, a sub-region of Margaret River. Of the winemaking, Vanya says "In the winery the wines really make themselves. We don't add yeast or acid, and as a result the wines are the purest expressions of place."

David Gleave MW recalls: "On my first visit to Cullen, just over 20 years ago, Di opened a bottle of 1983 Cabernet-Merlot for dinner. She explained that she had kept quite a bit of that vintage as it had been slow to sell. 'It was the first vintage we added Merlot to the blend,' she explained. 'As a result, people thought it was a cheap wine, as it was a blend rather than a varietal.' The wine, at almost 20 years of age, was outstanding. I felt grateful to the people who had turned their noses up at this modest blend (sold at \$7.95 a bottle when it was released, I seem to remember Di saying), for their pursuit of what was then fashionable ensured there was some for me to taste two decades later. I remember, a few years ago, Vanya tasting the 2013 Diana Madeleine with Jancis Robinson in London. When the wine was poured into her glass, Jancis raised it to her nose and said: 'It's what you want Margaux to be.' When Jancis published her note, she concluded: 'Dry finish and very neat and confident. The opposite of brash.' Just like Di."

CULLEN, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



This wine, our flagship 2019 Kevin John has been sourced from our old chardonnay vines planted in 1976-1988. They are Gin Gin Clone, also known as the Old Wente Clone originally from UC Davis. They produce tiny yields of the best quality fruit. **VANYA**

98 POINTS - HUON HOOKE THE REAL REVIEW

98 POINTS - JAMES SUCKLING
