



WORDS CLIVE HARTLEY

A TRIP TO THE VINES - WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFOREHAND

VISITING a wine region is a way of increasing your enjoyment in a glass of wine and it is a case of what you get out of a visit is equal to the effort you put into organising the day or weekend.

Before the visit call or email and make appointments to the producers that are not open; they can only say no. But if you are lucky to get an appointment be on time and don't overstay your welcome, and send a thank-you email afterwards. Check out in guidebooks and on Google who is kicking ass in the region. Check out Winesstate's reviews to see who's performing well. Roughly plan your day logically with a route in mind so you don't end up running up and down country lanes all day. And don't overstretch your appointment list. Sometimes I only manage three visits in a day.

Pack a notebook and pen to record some notes. Walking into a cellar door armed with that opens doors and creates an air of mystery. You will get treated with more respect and perhaps that special wine might be offered.

Arrive early in the region as it is better to visit producers when they are less crowded. When you arrive in the region call by the information centre to obtain a new map to check out who is open or closed and who has changed hands since your last visit. For your first appointment of the day choose a cellar that offers coffee, you might as well kill two birds with one stone!

Spit don't swallow. It is the sign of someone serious about wine. Have a glass or two of wine over lunch instead.

Do your research before you set off and

ask intelligent questions. Know who the winemaker is and any awards the winery have recently achieved. Get to know your clones - especially chardonnay and pinot noir. The most common chardonnay clones are Mendoza, the French Dijon clones (76,78,95,96) and American Davis clones. Read up on what difference this makes to the wine and test out the theory when you are being a poured a sample.

Mentioning winemaking terms such as MLF, lees stirring and the wineries approach can start a discussion or make the cellar door assistant run for the winemaker.

For instance, P58 is an old clone in the Mornington Peninsula which produces wines with a fuller palate and broad bean characters. While I10v5 clone offers more linear wines with higher acid levels with lemon citrus notes. Some clones are very rare like the Marble Hill clone at Mountadam and the Gin Gin clone used in Margaret River.

There are some 45 different pinot noir clones. Popular clones in Australia include MV6, 114, 115 and the Dijon clones 667 and 777. The Pommard clone excited me

recently during a visit to Yabby Lake in the Mornington Peninsula. In barrel it tasted of darker red fruits and lovely structure.

Mentioning winemaking terms such as MLF, lees stirring and the wineries approach can start a discussion or make the cellar door assistant run for the winemaker! The use of large oak vessels such as foudres are really trendy at the moment. Ask them what type of oak they use and how long does the wine spend maturing. If they say eight-10 months it means they clean the barrels out ready for the next vintage. If the wine spends 15-18 months in oak, it shows the wine is being taken more seriously as this involves additional expense and purchase of barrels across two vintages. So expect to pay more for these wines.

Inquire what wines are only for sale at cellar door. You might as well try and purchase something that is not for sale in your local bottle shop. Unfortunately some wines poured at cellar door can be cheaper in the shop due to aggressive discounting.

I find time and time again that the best wines in a range is the middle-priced ones. Larger producers who have a range of wines sit their wines in at different price points - level entry, mid-price and often premium/high price. Commonly the entry levels can be simple and the more expensive have over used oak influence. The middle-priced wine seems to retain freshness but also has a layer of complexity. It's called a well-balanced wine and part of what quality assessment is based on.

But don't ignore the larger producers in the region. It is not all about small,

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obscure cellar doors. They often have excellent cellar doors and work hard to offer something special and different for visitors.

Check out any winery walks or tours. These tours can be excellent and give you an insight into the history of the area. We have some hallowed ground and what I'd consider national historic treasures such as Tahbilk at Nagambie Lakes in Victoria and Tyrrells in the Hunter Valley that conduct tours, and I always take overseas visitors on these. Among other national treasures are both Seppelts and Best's at Great Western, Seppeltsfield in Barossa Valley, and Yalumba and Henschke in the Eden Valley. In the Clare Valley Sevenhills is another special place. Staying in the Clare Valley another tourist option is to take a bike ride or walk along the 35km riesling trail set on the old rail track which is another unique way of exploring a region.

On a modern front, a trip to the Yarra Valley is not complete without a visit to TarraWarra estate. The TarraWarra Museum of Art is outstanding with a constant line-up of top exhibitions, and what is better than to combine art with a glass of wine? 