

# Australian Wine Industry

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Who would have said 38 years ago that Australia would be among the top wine producers in the world, ranking sixth globally. In 1973, I was food and beverage manager and Maître D' at the Wandlyn Inn in Fredericton when I met this Australian wine representative in Fredericton to list a few of his white wines in New Brunswick. So we arrange for dinner at home and of course he brought a couple of bottles to sample with dinner. It's been so long ago that I don't remember the name of the representative and what the wines tasted. All I remember is that the wines were pleasant, very good, and different from the white wines we use to drink. So, I was convinced to list his wines on my menu. It did not sell very well, people did not know much about Australian wine and further more dining out and having wine with dinner was the beginning of a new trend, at least in Fredericton.

So here we are in 2011, with Australia now the largest wine exporter of the New World countries and second largest source of imports into United States after Italy (by volume; third by value).

As you probably know, Australia is a large country, roughly the size of United States, situated in the South Pacific Ocean southeast of the Asian landmass. It extends well into the tropics, but the southern third of the country is within the temperature latitude that begins 30 degrees south. This is where almost all the vineyards are found, mainly in the states of South Australia, New South Wales, and Victoria but also in Western Australia and the offshore state of Tasmania.

The country is hot and dry. In New South Wales, irrigation in the areas surrounding the few large rivers of Murray, Darling and Murrumbidgee provides the necessary water to turn this stretch of Outback into lush green vineyard land. In some other areas more moderate climate are found. Some parts of the south coast vineyards are exposed to maritime cooling by the usual westerly winds, especially around Adelaide in South Australia, near Melbourne in Victoria and south of Perth in Western Australia. The Great Dividing Range which parallels the Southwest coast from Melbourne to Brisbane allows vineyards to benefit of a cooler temperature at higher altitude of up to 3600 feet. The Island of Tasmania, the southernmost part of Australia is surrounded by the Cold Southern Ocean. This is the country's coolest winegrowing region.

Wineries in South Australia's Barossa Valley, in the Hunter River region of North Sydney in the New South Wales and in Victoria, played an important role in the development of the industry and continue to be important sources of fine wines. However, wine is produced in over 60 regions, reflecting the wide range of climates and soil types that exist across the continent

Some interesting facts about Australia: (statistics from 2008-2009)

Population:	21.3 million (2009)
Vineyard Area:	425,000 acres (2008)
Wine production:	137 million cases (2008)
Wine consumption:	53 million cases (2008)
Wine imports:	7 million cases (2008)
Wine Exports:	78 million cases (2008)

Over 130 types of grapes are used by commercial winemakers. Here is a list of the top 10 grape varieties by order of importance:

Shiraz, Chardonnay, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Merlot, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Sultana (mainly for raisins) Pinot Noir, Riesling, Colombard. However, in red wines, Cabernet Sauvignon is gaining ground over Shiraz.

A name commonly used in Australia for a red consisting of a blend of Grenache, Shiraz (Syrah) and Mourvèdre is the acronym GSM, the typical blends of the Rhône region in France. Grenache brings a pale red juice with soft berry scents and a bit of spiciness. As a blending component, it contributes alcohol, warmth and fruitiness without adding tannins. Shiraz can contribute full bodied, fleshy flavors of black fruits and pepper, along with color, backbone and tannins and provides the sense of balance such blends require. Mourvèdre brings in elegance, structure and acidity to the blend, producing flavors of sweet plums, roasted game and hints of tobacco.

At ANBL some of these great GSM are available:

D'Arenberg, The Stump Jump at 17,99\$

D'Arenberg The Ironstone Pressings 52,99

Hardy's Oomoo GSM at 19,99\$

Penfolds Bin 138 GSM at 39,78

Rosemount Estate GSM at 39,99\$

Australian Wine Laws has a place-of-origin system similar to the United States. The appellations officially known as «geographical indication» or GI are areas on the map. To list a single GI on a wine label, at least 85% of the grapes must have grown in that appellation. If the proportion is less than 85%, the winery has the option of listing all the GIs that apply or choosing a larger GI or appellation that meet the requirement. Ex: A wine produced with grapes from part New South Wales and part South Australia could have both names or use GI of South Eastern Australia, the multistate zone which includes these two «State/Territory».

Vintage dates and single grape varieties on a wine label have the same minimum level of 85%. If more than 15% of blending grape is added, which is often the case, the label may not mention any grape variety at all or list them all, in descending order of content. For example, a «Semillon-Chardonnay» contains 50% or more Semillon (but most likely less than 85% or else it would be called Semillon alone) and 50% or less Chardonnay.

Categories of Australian Geographic Indications was established in 1993. It has several territories that are nested one within another.

- Multistate  
«South Eastern Australia» combines New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, and parts of Queensland and South Australia in a single gigantic appellation. In other words, when a wine comes from South Eastern Australia it could come from anywhere in South Eastern Australia
- State / Territory  
New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania or Queensland.
- Zone  
An area within a state, not necessarily a viticultural area. The Adelaide zone itself contains three smaller zones and is therefore called a super zone.

### Region

Part of a zone defined by viticulturally common features. A region must be a contiguous area that has «measurable homogeneity in grapes growing attributes»

Additional requirements ensure that regions have a respectable level of activity by multiple grape growers. Region cannot overlap.

- Subregion

Part of a region. The requirements are the same as those for a region, except that the viticultural homogeneity must be «substantial».

So to let's take a look at the name «High Eden» on a label. It would mean that it comes from the subregion of High Eden who is part of Eden Valley region who is part of the sub zone of Barossa who is located in Adelaide superzone, part of South Australia State/Territory who is located in the Multistate zone of South Eastern Australia. Not easy to understand even if you have a map in front of you showing all the regions. But not worse than France or United State. When you become a passionate of wines, it does not take long before you find out from what region your favorite wine comes from.

One region to watch is the Tasmanian wine industry. It produces high quality wines. The Tamar region in particular has developed a reputation for his Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, which are well suited to the cooler Tasmanian climate.

In recent years, Australian wine industry results have been impressive. The big oaky taste is less present in the new vintages. The wines are more elegant and pleasant like never before. The strong Shiraz is more and more blended with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet franc, Tempranillo and other well-known varieties.

Australia's most famous wine is Penfolds Grange. The great 1955 vintage was submitted to competitions since 1962 and over the years has won more than 50 gold medals. But other Australian wines are also scoring big points. As an example, in Wine Spectator's top 100 wine in 2011 we find: Two Hands Shiraz Barossa Valley Bella's Garden 2008 (94 points), Schild Shiraz Barossa 2008 (94 points), Mollydooker Shiraz McLaren Vale Carnival of Love 2009 (94 points), Fetish Shiraz Barossa Valley The Watcher 2008 (91 points), d'Arenberg The Stump Jump Red South Australia 2008 (90 points), Peter Lehmann Clancy's Barossa 2007 (90 points)

Today, the country is one of the world's leading producers of quality, moderately-priced wines. The Australians plans to be the largest wine producer by 2025. This is a very aggressive target when you consider that China is now one of the top ten world wine producing countries and growing.

If you were disappointed with Australian wines a few years back, you should try them again. You will be pleasantly surprised of the change. I know that I was!

Cheers!

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