

# The Wines They Are a-Changin'

WINE AUSTRALIA USA SHOWS OFF THE DIVERSE  
WINES THAT DOWN UNDER HAS TO OFFER

by Fred Swan / photos by Stephanie Secretst

Tom Donegan (left) and Henry Hudson, from Hudson Wine Brokers—a boutique Australian wine importer, focusing on premium Australian wines from diverse regions across Australia—share wines with the guests of the Wine Australia USA event.



Chuck Hayward, one of America's foremost experts on Australian wine, co-led the excellent pre-tasting seminar along with Wine Australia Global Education Manager Mark Davidson.



On February 10 in San Francisco, trade and media savored Australian wines at an event presented by Wine Australia USA. The day opened with a tasting seminar featuring 12 absolutely stunning wines. From Riesling to Chardonnay, Shiraz to Cabernet Sauvignon, they showed the breadth of styles, complexity and sophistication that Australia presents.

“Our wines offer authenticity and history,” says Jonathan Hesketh of Parker Coonawarra. “It’s nice that the real Australia is starting to be recognized here.” And well they should be. These are exactly the characteristics sommeliers, sellers and consumers are looking for today.

Many Australian wineries have succeeded in the U.S.—Penfolds, Yalumba, d’Arenberg and Leeuwin among them. Nonetheless, Aussie shelf space here is often dominated by wines not representative of Australia’s best. Now, conditions are favorable for change. Improved exchange rates, trade and consumer sentiment and the wealth of current and new offerings in the U.S. provide good opportunity for trade to get on board, and benefit, with Australia.

“There are a lot of family-owned wineries and a big focus on sense of place,” adds Ben von Doussa, North America Market Entry Program Manager for Wine Australia. “They are quality-driven.”

“We are sharing premium wines that showcase Australia’s diverse regions and styles,” adds Angela Slade, Head of Market for North America. “There is a renewed excitement about Australian wine from trade and consumers alike, a sentiment reflected by our latest export figures.” Australian exports increased 14% in 2015. Sales value increased at every price level.

Roughly the same physical size as the U.S., Australia offers a huge variety of climates, soils and topographies. Its wines are almost unavoidably diverse and unique. *Vitis vinifera* grape varieties took root in Australia the year before George Washington became our first president. Within a century, Australian wines were winning international awards. Australia is still home to the world’s oldest producing grapevines for several important varieties, due to relative isolation from phylloxera.

Iconic Australian wines, such as Penfolds Grange and Henschke Hill of Grace, are globally prized and highly allocated. Despite that, and the U.S. being Australia’s top export market, the full depth and diversity from Down Under has been largely overlooked here. It’s been a hard market to tap for many premium Australian producers. That’s changing.

“Timing is right and the exchange rate is favorable,” says Limestone Coast Wines principal Justin Moran. His company has significant sales in Europe, but he’s just moved to Manhattan to focus on the U.S. introduction. “We’ve built a business that will allow us to grow without discounting.” Discounting has hurt Australia’s brand in the past, eroding perceived quality.

Even without discounting, Australian wines offer excellent value. Limestone Coast Wines’ 2014 The Hidden Sea Sauvignon Blanc (\$20) is vibrantly aromatic with passion fruit and flowers, but offers rich minerality on the palate. The sophisticated Parker Coonawarra Estate 2013 Coonawarra Series Cabernet Sauvignon (\$20) is well-balanced and offers a full-spectrum of flavors, both fruity and savory, with plenty of minerality. ■■



**Jonathan Hesketh of Parker Coonawarra, a maker of terroir-driven wines inflected with the accent of their region’s famous red soils.**



**Justin Moran’s Hidden Sea offers both authenticity and value in packaging that is eye-catching but sophisticated.**