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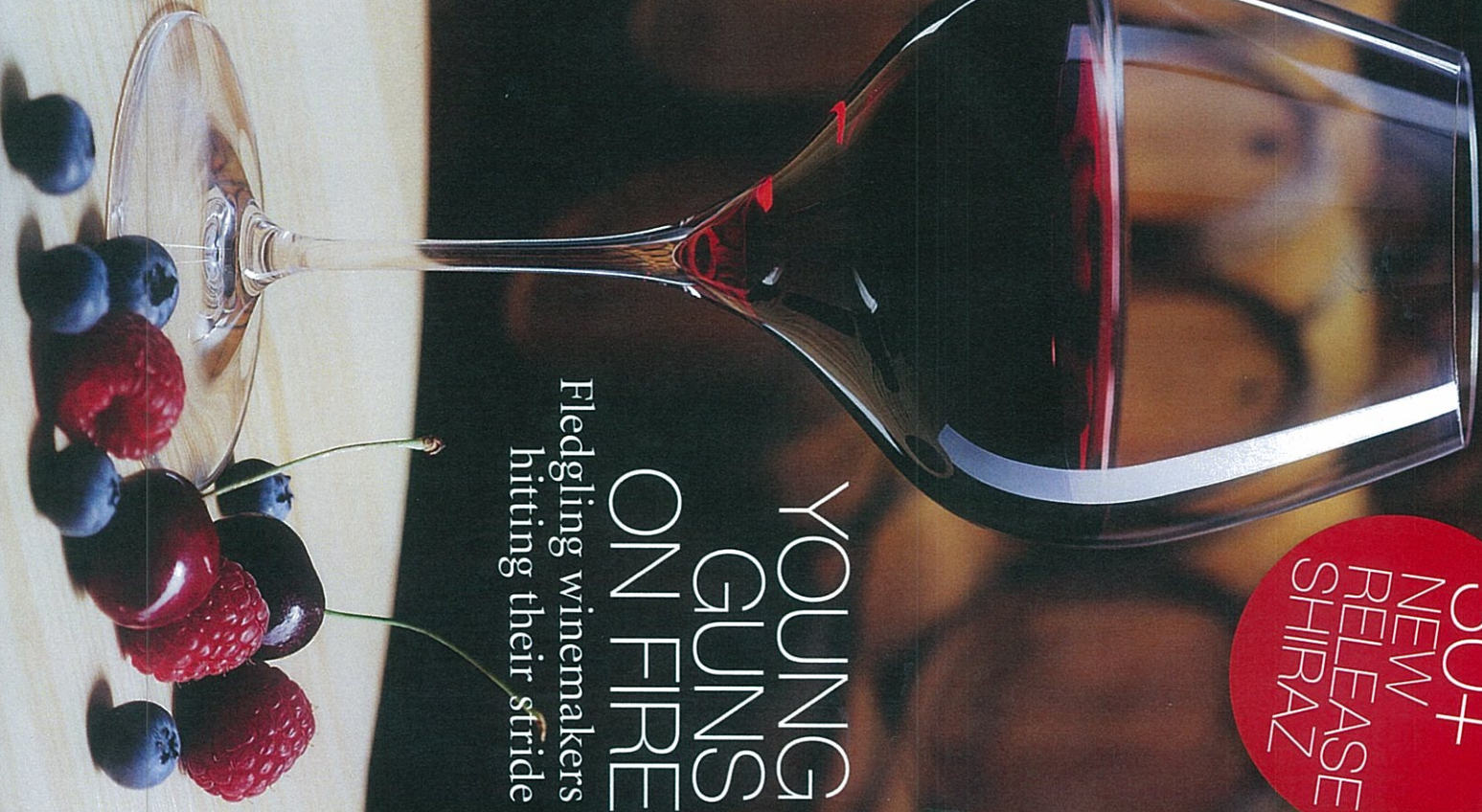
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TASTINGS

THIS ISSUE

Page 148 Best Buy Wines. Our panel of experts (below) flag great-value local and imported wines in various price brackets, as well as top drops to cellar.

Page 154 Bob Campbell rates 12 of his favourite New Zealand red blends.

Page 157 Huon Hooke and Bob Campbell taste and rate 100 new releases.

THE PANEL



MAX ALLEN



PETER BOURNE



BOB CAMPBELL MW



PETER FORRESTAL



HUON HOOKE



JEREMY OLIVER

TASTING AND RATING POLICY

93-100 ★★★★★
Outstanding wine

85-92 ★★★★★
Extremely good wine

78-84 ★★★★★
Very good wine of its type

Where wines are rated, the scores reflect how the reviewers have assessed the wines relative to others in their category. Where wines are not rated, this indicates that not all wines were tasted in a controlled tasting environment. Wines scoring fewer than three stars are not included in articles where wines are tasted and given a specific rating. The 100-point scale indicates the average score given by our tasting panel or, in some cases, the opinion of an individual wine expert, and reflects how a wine compares with others in its category. The person or persons responsible for these scores

are identified at the beginning of each story or on tasting notes.

NOTE ON PRICES: Wine producers and their distributors are asked to supply the recommended retail price for each wine tasted. Where applicable, we run recommended retail prices for both Australia and New Zealand. Prices may vary depending on the outlet. If a wine is not distributed in one or other of the countries, the local price will not be given. However, it may be possible to order through an overseas distributor, listed on page 171 of this issue.

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GOURMET TRAVELLER
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Best Buy Wines

\$15 AND UNDER

2008 Westend Tempranillo, Hilltops, A\$15

The Westend winery in the Riverina is building up an impressive portfolio of well-priced, interesting wines that tap into the current trend towards emerging varieties. I've reviewed the terrifically savoury aglianico on this page before (the 2008 was a bargain at \$15 – let alone, as I saw recently, discounted to \$12), and this tempranillo, sourced from the cooler, higher, Hilltops region is also worth tracking down: snappy dark-cherry fruit, medium-bodied juiciness and gently grippy tannins. MA



2011 McGuigan The Semillon Blanc, Hunter Valley, A\$13

This is a solid silver medal wine and, when you factor in its price, this new style is arguably the best-value white of the year. Neil McGuigan has stolen a winemaking and marketing march on his colleagues and struck a blow against the might of Marlborough sauvignon with this bright new Hunter style. It is fresh, clean and vibrantly juicy with green bean and fresh garden-herb flavours, a hint of sweetness and a crisp, refreshing finish. PF



NV Cockatoo Ridge Cockatoo Black Sparkling Red Cuvée, South East Australia, A\$13

Back in 1990, winemaking larrikin Geoff Merrill launched Cockatoo Ridge as an everyday, easy-drinking wine. Two decades later the brand has been revitalised by its current owner Peter Toohey, while winemaker Rodney Hooper has ensured that Merrill's everyday drinkability test is preserved. It has sweet perfumes of raspberry pasille and wild mushroom, and a soft, round palate of dark plum and black cherry. The touch of sweetness nicely balances the tannin grip. PB



2010 Swings & Roundabouts

Chenin Blanc, Margaret River, A\$15
Accomplished former Seppelt winemaker Brian Fletcher has a hand in producing this wine. Barrel fermentation in older oak, with high-solids juice and other techniques have imbued it with a great deal of character, putting it in a higher league than most Australian chenin blancs. There's an intriguing bouquet of struck flint, together with roasted nut, spice and baked-apple aromas. It's soft and round in the mouth, with a hint of sweetness, lovely balance and drinkability, and surprising length. HH



2009 Babich Lone Tree Merlot Cabernet, Hawkes Bay, NZ\$15

A blend of merlot (31 per cent), cabernet sauvignon (46 per cent) and cabernet franc (3 per cent) from the Gimblett Gravels district of Hawkes Bay. The varieties were fermented in stainless steel before being blended and racked to oak barrels, where the wine spent a further six months. This is by far the best example of the four vintages reviewed in the past thanks at least in part to an excellent vintage in 2009. It has moderate weight with strong ripe-berry fruit flavours, with a seasoning of spicy oak. BC



2009 Thorn Clarke Sandpiper Shiraz, Barossa, A\$15/NZ\$20

Evidence that 2009 did produce some delightfully bright Barossa shiraz. A slightly jammy, sweet fragrance of cassis, blackberry, mulberry and dark plum is lifted by some fresh vanilla oak and a hint of blue flowers. Its sumptuous, juicy palate of intense dark berry and plum flavour knits easily with mocha and vanilla oaks, some fine, crunchy tannins and a hint of menthol. It finishes with plenty of length. JO

