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SUPER-TALENTED Neil McGuigan has taken on the might of New Zealand's sauvignon blanc producers with a rival wine he believes may eventually cut significantly into the Marlborough region's dominance with the variety.

On a visit to London two years ago, McGuigan was advised by one of the UK's leading retail chains that Australia urgently needed to create an exciting new style to challenge the awesome appeal of Marlborough sauvignon blanc.

Last year, McGuigan returned to the Old Dart with a 100 per cent semillon-based wine fashioned from vintage 2010 in the old white burgundy style that ruled the roost in Australia four decades earlier.

Controversially, he labelled it The Semillon Blanc, in what amounts to an Australian ambush to cash in on the



sauvignon blanc bonanza. More than 15,000 dozen sales later, it's now being hailed as Britain's top white wine discovery.

McGuigan is now banking on the 2011 McGuigan The Semillon Blanc (\$12) making a stunning debut in Australia.

Ultimately, he hopes the wine will lead consumers on the palate path to the Hunter Valley's esteemed aged semillons which rank in the very top echelon of super-premium Australian wine.

The 2011 McGuigan The Semillon Blanc is an unwooded blend from three

non-Hunter regions: Riverland, Sunraysia and Barossa Valley. When I first tasted it, I was convinced McGuigan had sneaked a little sauvignon blanc into the blend but he assured those at the launch this was definitely not the case.

It certainly has sauvignon blanc characters, though, that complement its fresh, flavoursome, aromatic appeal.

"Semillon is the variety that produces three defining styles — chablis, riesling and white burgundy," explains McGuigan, whose winemaking team has dominated major show judgings in the UK in the past two years.

"The Semillon Blanc is a sexed-up version of white burgundy.

"It's our hope that once consumers give it a try they will eventually graduate to classic semillons."

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