

The Weekend Australian Magazine
October 23-24, 2010

 THE
AUSTRALIAN



JAMES
HALLIDAY

Yarra v the world

WHEN GARRY AND Julie Hounsell embarked on a biennial international chardonnay event to showcase the Yarra Valley's relative merits, they didn't pull any

punches. They assembled 40 highly rated chardonnays, from the Yarra Valley (15), Burgundy (16), New Zealand (5), Italy (3) and California (1). The Yarra Valley wines were from 2006, the Burgundies from the acclaimed 2007 vintage, the New Zealand wines from 2008.

The trigger was the 10th anniversary of Toolangi Vineyards' wines; the Hounsell family began planting the vineyard in the mid-'90s, and released the first wines in 2001.

They flew Debra Meiburg MW from Hong Kong, Bob Campbell MW from New Zealand, Huon Hooke from Sydney, and myself from just up the hill, as it were. We blind-tasted the 40 wines; given the varied backgrounds of the panel, and the diversity of the wine styles, the degree of consensus between us was remarkable.

If Garry Hounsell had been able to script the result, he couldn't have come up with a better outcome

Our reward that night was a small dinner at Chateau Yering, with great wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy ex the Hounsell family cellar. The next day more than 100 people arrived for an afternoon tasting of 21 of the 40 wines, arranged into three flights of seven wines. In each case there were three Yarra chardonnays, the other wines mainly from Burgundy, but with one from New Zealand in each flight. The session was chaired by Philip Rich of Prince Wine Store.

The first flight was tasted open, the identity of each wine known. The other two were tasted blind, the wines known, but not the order in which they were arranged. The audience was a mix of professionals and dedicated consumers. Each person was allowed two votes for each wine; these were counted on a show of hands.

In the first bracket '07 Christian Moreau Vaillon Chablis was the most favoured, '06 Ser-rat second. In the next bracket '06 Yering Station Reserve was a clear winner, '06 Tarrawarra Reserve second. In the final bracket, '06 Cold-stream Hills Reserve was the clear winner, '06 Toolangi Reserve second.

The results weren't fudged in any way. But if Garry Hounsell had been able to script the result, he couldn't have come up with a better outcome. Fortune can favour the bold.