

# Semillon

Master of Wine **Rob Geddes** reveals why the sometimes shy variety, semillon, has become a fine, elegant wine for which Australia is world-renowned.

**S**emillon has its origins in Bordeaux. The modern geography for semillon plantings include Australia, Republic of South Africa, Washington State, Chile, and New Zealand (blended). In the US, retailers see it as a sub- \$10 range and it's all associated with volume and Washington State. Chile is starting to explore it and there's an emerging trend in New Zealand for blending with sauvignon. The Australian GI regions for semillon include the Hunter Valley, coastal New South Wales, New England, South Australia's Barossa Valley and Eden Valley, and Western Australia as semillon sauvignon blanc (SSB) and oaked styles such as Fermoy.

In Australia, we are good at producing semillon and we have a diverse offering. There is a miraculous relationship between the coast of New South Wales and semillon – anywhere it's a little humid in NSW, it does exceptionally well. It is a grape varietal that gives us a chance to make fine, elegant wines. Like merlot, it has a weak root system that can die relatively young. The oldest semillon is in the Hunter Valley from vines dating back to 1896. Hungry, thin sands work best with semillon. It thrives in a wide range of climates but it's only where it can be early picked that it really shines. When fully ripe, it loses acidity and fades.

Key producers include:

**Hunter Valley:**

Tyrrells Wines, Brokenwood, Meerea Park, Audrey Wilkinson, Tulloch and McWilliam's Wines.

**Barossa Valley:**

Peter Lehman (the number one selling style), and Henschke.

**Western Australia:**

Cullen, Moss Wood, Pierro, Stella Bella, as well as a plethora of classic dry whites producers.

## The flavour

Youthful semillon flavours include lanolin, soap flakes, wax, lime and citrus. Semillon sauvignon blanc flavours include citrus, fuller palate juicy fruit chewing gum, parsley. Oaked semillon flavours include tobacco, lightly nutty. Aged flavours of semillon are nutty (appears like oak ageing when in fact it is not) honey and buttered toast.

Semillon has the classic attributes of a great grape variety. When young, you can judge its quality but you can't judge its massive transformation as it ages. It will be subtle and quite shy young, moving to buttery, honey, lemon meringue characters, and then finally, toasty.



## Semillon styles

### Riper, early drinking style

#### Margan Semillon 2009

**Region:** Hunter Valley

**LUC:** \$11.38

**ABV:** 13.5 per cent

Ripe citrus/apple fruit characters; sweet fruit character indicative of a youthful, ready to drink style. The epitome of a drink now, summer semillon – fruit is soft, delicate and gentle.

#### Peter Lehmann Barossa Semillon 2008

**Region:** Barossa Valley, SA

**LUC:** \$8.82

**ABV:** 11 per cent

Crisp, fresh, tart – Hunteresque citrus, aniseed and herbal notes will develop over the next two years. Soft acid palate, quite mouthfilling in its flavour. A subtle fruited, freshly flavoured, medium length dry white wine.

### Unoaked, austere (now often seen as maturation releases)

#### Tyrrell's HVD Hunter Semillon 2004

**Region:** Hunter Valley, NSW

**LUC:** \$19.89

**ABV:** 10.7 per cent

Mineral /citrus/lanolin aromas with a certain earthiness. Mature fruit texture, roundness but within that, still a lovely line up of line acidity. Nice long line of acid and fine fruit length which is what you're paying for in a more expensive semillon. It lands with subtle power and dignity.

#### Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon 2003

**Region:** Hunter Valley, NSW

**LUC:** \$37.09

**ABV:** 10.5 per cent

The epitome of everything that is fine in semillon. A mature rounded texture yet really subtle. Flavours are young with fresh citrus, citrus flower, red apple, good long length of flavour. A 'time machine' of a wine – it has another 20 years ahead of it – with tangy acidity, tingling fruit showing lemon zest citrus with subtlety yet intensity.

#### Peter Lehmann Margaret Semillon 2004

**Region:** Barossa Valley, SA

**LUC:** \$19.35

**ABV:** 11.5 per cent

This wine is at the mature end, with toast characters about to peep through. Fuller in texture rich middle palate, sweet fruit, citrus honey toast flavours with ripeness and a long texture and rich finish.

### Barrel fermented

#### Mount Horrocks Clare Valley Semillon 2008

**Region:** Clare Valley, SA

**LUC:** \$17.74

**ABV:** 13.5 per cent

Subtle and complex, weaves sweet tobacco oak and lemony semillon citrus; little bit of clove from the very fine French oak. Seamless, rich palate length, with richness of structure, oak spice and fresh lemon citrus semillon flavours.



### Kilikanoon Barrel Fermented Semillon 2009

**Region:** Clare Valley, SA

**LUC:** \$13.97

**ABV:** 12.5 per cent

Banana notes on nose; riper, richer fruit. Strident oak levels. Citrus fruit and obvious richness with the ability to grow into a relationship between the oak and the fruit. Full bodied, creamy fleshy fruit palate depth in middle with oak providing the finish.

### Kilikanoon Barrel Fermented Semillon 2007

**Region:** Clare Valley, SA

**LUC:** \$13.97

**ABV:** 12.5 per cent

Oak toast and ripe semillon notes have come together and the wine has a distinctly toasty edge. It weaves a web between the oak toast and semillon maturity to build a complex wine. Impressive, powerful richness that has softened and matured.

## Semillon sauvignon blanc blends

### Mount Pleasant Florence Semillon Sauvignon Blanc 2009

**Region:** Hunter Valley, NSW

**LUC:** \$12.04

**ABV:** 11.5 per cent

Good winemaking detail in this wine. Rich, deep-set fruit flavours with fruit sweetness. Structure adds a lot of 'tasteable' fruit. Generous fruit on the middle palate with juicy passionfruit herbals, detailed acidity, quite lively acid finishes sweet.



## Classic dry whites

This style is sometimes an SSB, at other times an additional variety either chardonnay/chenin blanc or verdelho can be added.

### Evans & Tate Classic White 2009

**Region:** Margaret River, WA

**LUC:** \$13.44

**ABV:** 12.5 per cent

Lavender aromas with some herbal and citrus; passionfruit on palate. Full flavoured and easy drinking style that has made it a household name.

## Botrytis styles

### DeBortoli Vat 5 Botrytis Semillon 2007

**Region:** NSW

**LUC:** \$9.15

**ABV:** 11 per cent

Semillon will make fantastic sweet wines. Australian botrytis semillon style is a very rich wine globally but 'Deen' is more in line with classic Sauterne style. Candied pear and candied pineapple, no oak, an early picked wine that is fresh, sweet and with a round medium weight and length.

### DeBortoli Noble One 2007

**Region:** Hunter Valley, NSW

**LUC:** \$22.74

**ABV:** 10 per cent

Full scale candied pineapple with rich, concentrated candied pear, peach and apricot. A whole riot of tropical and autumn fruit just partying away in there. It all comes together elegantly. The wine has great concentration and lusciousness, oak married perfectly into the wine. Such an intense wine.