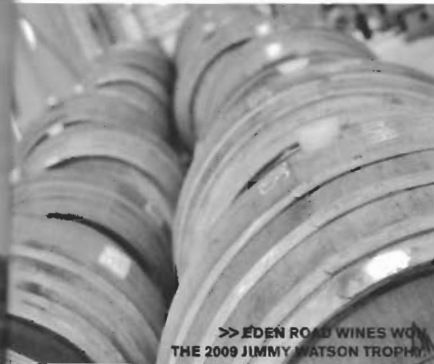


>> EDEN ROAD WINES
ENJOYED CONSIDERABLE
SUCCESS SINCE OPENING IN 2002

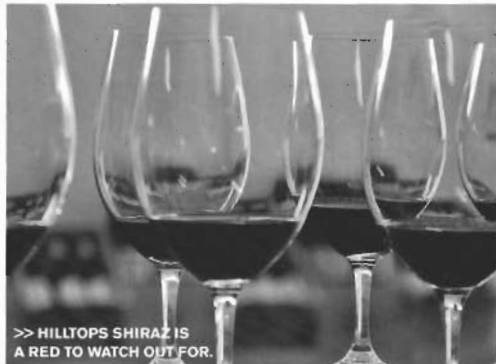


Capital **DROPS**

Some key wins at wine shows and consistently good wines means that people are starting to sit up and take notice of the Canberra region and its surrounds, writes Christine Salins.



>> EDEN ROAD WINES WON THE 2009 JIMMY WATSON TROPHY



>> HILLTOPS SHIRAZ IS A RED TO WATCH OUT FOR.



>> THE CANBERRA DISTRICT WINE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION COVERS THE CANBERRA, HILLTOPS AND TUMBARUMBA REGIONS.

In a show of faith in the two regions, Eden Road winemaker Nick Spencer has released two premium wines labelled simply 'Canberra' and 'Tumbarumba'. The Canberra wine is a 2009 Shiraz and the Tumbarumba wine is a 2008 Chardonnay, but that's not apparent from the label, which promotes the region rather than the variety. "It's a way to establish some sort of conversation about Canberra being one of the best places in the world for Shiraz," Spencer said.

The president of the **Canberra District Wine Industry Association** is one of a growing band of winemakers who is similarly excited about Tumbarumba. "It's one of the next regions to watch for top quality wine," he said. Spencer's bold labelling exercise is paying off. Despite making only a small volume, he has already succeeded in getting the wines into some of the best restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne.

Eden Road Wines, which opened in 2008 in the formerly Hardys-owned Kamberra winery, also has an entry level range, The Seedling, and a middle-tier range, Long Road. The 2008 Long Road Shiraz took out the Jimmy Watson trophy at the 2009 Melbourne Wine Show, assuring the future of the fledgling winery. "It was a really good way of picking up both consumer and trade awareness," Spencer said. The Shiraz for that wine came from Hilltops – another region that is beginning to create excitement in the industry.

Both regions have had a tough time of late – the 2010 vintage was challenging, and high humidity and rain has caused incredible disease pressures. It was too early to tell precisely, but Spencer expects yields will be down 50 to 60 per cent in Canberra. "There are some vineyards that have been completely wiped out," Spencer said. "The vineyards that don't have any disease are shaping up to look very good. Because it has been generally cooler this year, there is a lot more varietal

definition in the wines. Riesling will be tight and austere. Shiraz will be very fragrant and spicy. It should be a stunning year."

Spencer said 2010 was cooler and wetter than usual. "There's some really exciting wine from 2010 but having said that, there was a lot of rain in 2010 and there's a lot of ordinary wine too. I would hope that consumers don't get to see the ordinary ones."

Spencer said retailers now have a great perception of Canberra. "I'm not sure that's translated to the consumer level yet but with the support of retailers, it should."

Fergus McGhie, of **Mount Majura Vineyard**, believes there has been a major shift in consumer perceptions in the last year or two. Now even Canberra people are looking for Canberra wine, he said, while **Dan Murphy's** now has a separate Canberra section. Consumers can go into any one of about 26 local supermarkets and see locally-crafted wooden stands carrying the Canberra wine region's Liquid Geography logo. **The Canberra Wine Collective** stands carry wines from six of the region's producers: Tallagandra Hill, Gundog Estate, Yarrh Wines, Wily Trout, Maipenrai and Four Winds Vineyard.

John and Sarah Collingwood, of **Four Winds Vineyard**, who initiated the collective, said the wines were priced at \$17 or under to encourage people to try them. Four Winds makes an attractive Sangiovese and has released a light, unoaked 2010 Shiraz that is, as Sarah puts it, "in a Beaujolais style... groovy and uncomplicated". Now the Collingwoods are planning to take their Canberra Wine Collective stands to regional NSW and beyond.

Fergus McGhie says the Canberra District is "really kicking huge goals". He cited Alex McKay, of **Collector Wines**, winning a trophy at the Sydney Royal Wine Show for his 2009 Marked Tree Shiraz, and Nick O'Leary's 2009 Shiraz trophy win in the NSW Wine Awards. Along with Nick

Spencer, these young bloods are injecting a new enthusiasm into the region.

McGhie said retailers were picking what's unique and special from the region. Australian Capital Tourism's Liquid Geography campaign had put the spotlight on Canberra as a producer of top Shiraz and Riesling. "I think we're selling that story pretty well," McGhie said. "But there's some exciting stuff going on outside of Shiraz and Riesling."

Bryan Martin produces an excellent Sangiovese under his **Ravensthorch** label, Paul Starr has some Sagrantino planted at **Quarry Hill** vineyard, and **Lark Hill** has been having great success with **Grüner Veltliner**. Mount Majura has been contacted by some of Melbourne's leading restaurants for its **Tempranillo, Graciano** and TSG blend (Tempranillo, Shiraz and Graciano). Winemaker, Frank van der Loo, has planted a trial plot of **Mondeuse and Touriga**, some of which might be released next year. "We want to get some Grüner Veltliner because we think that'd be fun to play with," McGhie said.

Lark Hill produced Australia's first Grüner Veltliner in 2009. The 2010 is just hitting its straps – spicy and savoury with zingy, succulent acid. Lark Hill's Dave Carpenter said the wine had a curiosity factor and he believed the vineyard's bio-dynamic certification was appealing to consumers. "Sommeliers are also telling us that it is a great food/wine matcher because it has texture and weight without losing freshness, and it has no particularly overt fruit characters so it doesn't get pigeon-holed into one cuisine type." Carpenter said 2010 and 2011 were very different vintages – watched with extra attention after the district's ripper 2009 vintage.

Whereas 2010 was very hot, 2011 looked like a return to the cooler vintages of the past. However, this could be bittersweet – with a year's annual average rainfall

falling in six months, vineyards have faced a constant risk of downy mildew.

"Essentially, we have been spraying on every clear day," said Carpenter, who is using bio-dynamic milk, copper and sulphur sprays, as well as silica and chamomile tea. They have managed to keep infection under control, an interesting and encouraging result for others looking at organic or bio-dynamic certification.

"While we are confident that Chardonnay and Pinot Noir will be excellent from 2011, the real stars may be Riesling, with excellent canopies and gentle ripening giving incredible subtlety and floral characters."

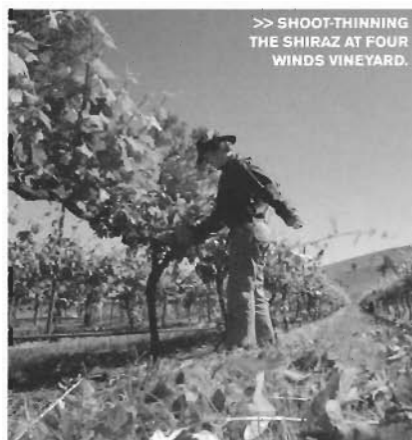
Jennie Mooney, of **Capital Wines**, said they had put 21 sprays on their Kyeema vineyard since Christmas. "In a normal year it would be two. It's an unbelievably expensive year." Capital's flagship wines are its Reserve Shiraz and Reserve Merlot, a long-time success story for winemaker Andrew McEwen, who is a partner in the venture. Their core range is the Ministry series, which they are selling as far afield as Western Australia, where they are struggling to keep up with demand. The 2010 Tempranillo, due to be bottled in June, promises to be stunning, with Mooney calling it their child prodigy.

Anne Caine, manager of Lerida Estate, said it was extraordinary that of the 32 wineries with cellar doors in Canberra, 10 had been awarded five-star status by James Halliday. This was probably the highest, proportionally, of any region in Australia and it was primarily on the back of Shiraz and Riesling.

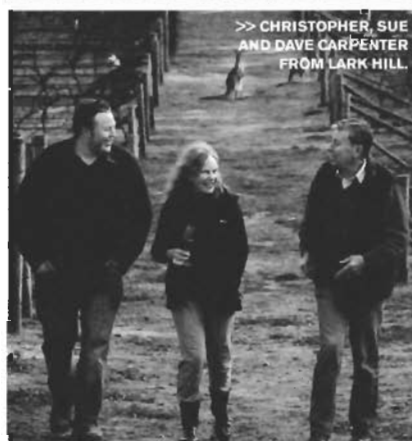
Helm Wines has won numerous accolades for its Riesling, and winemaker, Ken Helm, has been instrumental in organising the Canberra International Riesling Challenge. More recently, Shaw Wines has also won considerable acclaim, both in Australia and internationally, for its Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Back at Lerida Estate, on the Lake George escarpment, the higher altitude allows Pinot Noir to shine. Winemaker, Malcolm Burdett, has been doing a lot of work to identify the best sites and last year three were released to highlight the differences.

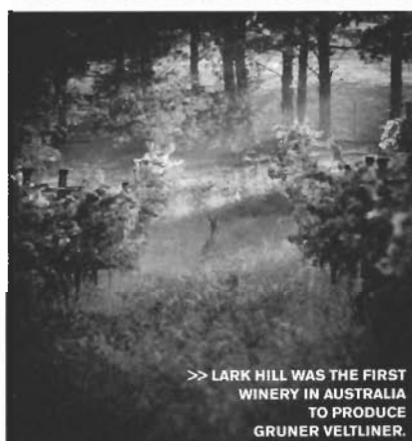
The flagship 2008 Josephine (\$78) has layers of strawberry and savoury characters, while the 2008 Cullerin Pinot Noir (\$35) is



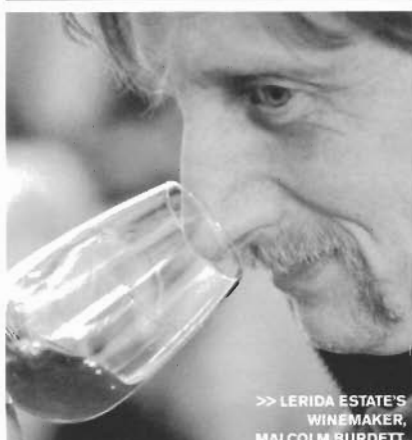
>> SHOOT-THINNING THE SHIRAZ AT FOUR WINDS VINEYARD.



>> CHRISTOPHER, SUE AND DAVE CARPENTER FROM LARK HILL.



>> LARK HILL WAS THE FIRST WINERY IN AUSTRALIA TO PRODUCE GRUNER VETLINER.



>> LERIDA ESTATE'S WINEMAKER, MALCOLM BURDETT.

earthy, brooding and more masculine than the 2008 Lake George Pinot Noir (\$24) which is soft with spicy, sweet fruit. But it is with the Botrytis Pinot Gris and Shiraz Viognier that Lerida has had the most commercial success with.

Clonakilla Wines Shiraz Viognier is considered a benchmark for the style in Australia. Winemaker, Tim Kirk, said the 2010 Shiraz Viognier was more elegant and spicy than the 2008 and 2009 vintages. "It's a return to more classic cool climate flavours." Kirk said there was a real interest in Canberra wine now, both at wine shows and at a retail level. "I think people are looking for wines they can have with dinner – wines with a savoury aromatic style rather than a sweet profile. Canberra is in a very good position to cater to that. We do medium-bodied spicy savoury Shiraz." Clonakilla began sourcing Hilltops fruit in 2000 when a frost wreaked havoc on its crop. Kirk now makes its flagship Shiraz Viognier from the Clonakilla vineyard, a Hilltops Shiraz and O'Riada Shiraz, the latter sourced from "very good Canberra growers". Whereas Canberra Shiraz has raspberry and red cherry notes, Hilltops Shiraz has licorice and blackberries. "They're not tannic, heavy wines but they are more robust (than Canberra wines)," Kirk said. "They have a bit more mid-palate punch. They look a bit bigger and riper."

Chalkers Crossing winemaker, Celine Rousseau, originally thought Cabernet Sauvignon was Hilltops' flagship variety because it was so consistent. "But with some age – our vineyard is now 16 years old – I think Shiraz is catching up," she said. Hilltops reds have the best of both worlds, she said, with the soft tannins that come from a cool climate but the fruit generosity that comes from being able to fully ripen their fruit. Rousseau was thrilled to get international recognition for Chalkers Crossing 2007 Shiraz which won a gold medal at the Syrah du Monde in France last year. Chalkers Crossing makes a Hilltops Semillon, Riesling, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon, turning to Tumbarumba for Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. In January, it launched a second label, CC², using fruit from three Hilltops vineyards. Although aged in oak, the Shiraz is easy-drinking and fruity. Tumbarumba whites, meanwhile, were lean, subtle and

stylish, she said. "For Tumbarumba, the icon is definitely Chardonnay. It is mineral and citrusy, with really good acidity. It is recognised now as the best NSW Chardonnay." Rousseau makes a very lean, flinty Chardonnay "so I can show the consumer that we have wines that can age so well". Her 2005 and 2006 vintages are drinking beautifully.

There are about 33 growers in Hilltops, 13 of which are producing wine. Most of the fruit goes to companies such as McWilliam's, Westend Estate and the producer of Yellowtail, Casella Wines.

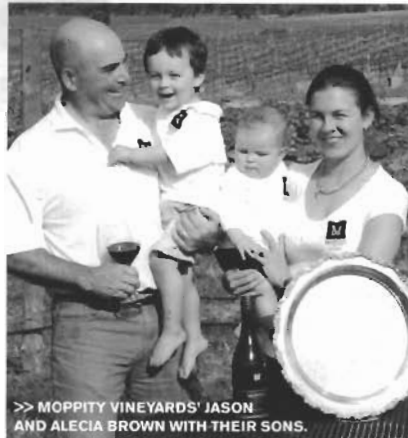
Westend's Cool Climate series includes a Tumbarumba Pinot Noir and Hilltops Riesling, Shiraz and Tempranillo. Elizabeth Calabria said Westend had been seeking "to discover new regions that do not have a commercial aspect", when they came across a Tumbarumba vineyard with outstanding Pinot.

McWilliam's Barwang range includes a Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz from Hilltops, and a Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay from Tumbarumba. These wines over-deliver for the price but the real star is the Barwang 842 Tumbarumba Chardonnay, with great flavour, complexity and palate structure.

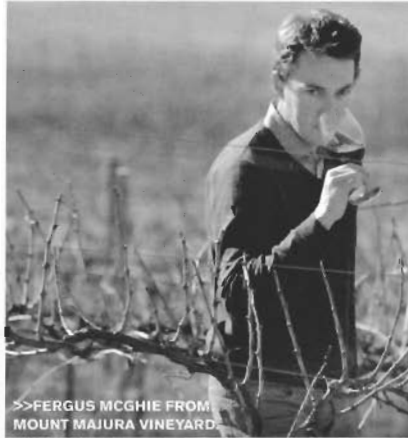
Penfolds also makes a Tumbarumba Chardonnay. The high altitude gave Bin 311 some protection from the late summer heat wave that afflicted the 2009 vintage, resulting in an elegant wine with apple and melon notes, minerality and an intriguing smokiness – the company says this was deliberate, not a bushfire taint.

Constellation Wines Australia sources Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier from two Tumbarumba vineyards, mostly for two of its sparkling wines, Hardys Sir James Vintage Pinot Noir Chardonnay and Hardys Sir James Tumbarumba Cuvee. The latter has been enormously successful on the show circuit, making it into this year's Top 100 in the Sydney International Wine Competition.

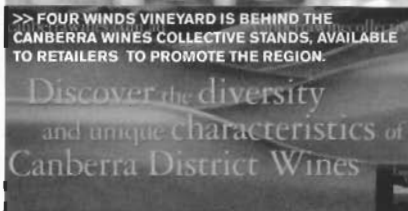
When Jason Brown bought Moppity Vineyards near Young in 2004, it was a managed investment scheme that had gone belly up. The property had supplied fruit to Hardys but had never bottled under its own label. "It was a leap of faith in a sense because there was no wine history to look back on," Brown said. It has paid off



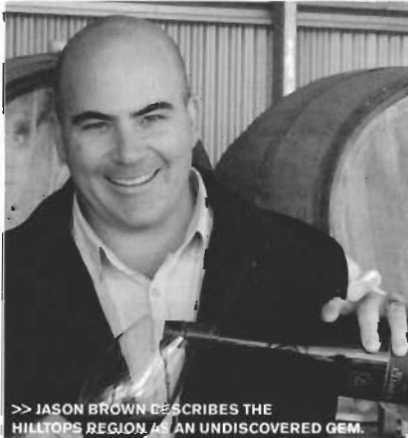
>> MOPPITY VINEYARDS' JASON AND ALECIA BROWN WITH THEIR SONS.



>> FERGUS MCGHIE FROM MOUNT MAJURA VINEYARD.



>> FOUR WINDS VINEYARD IS BEHIND THE CANBERRA WINES COLLECTIVE STANDS, AVAILABLE TO RETAILERS TO PROMOTE THE REGION.



>> JASON BROWN DESCRIBES THE HILLOPS REGION AS AN UNDISCOVERED GEM.

handsomely. "We've gone from 1000 cases seven years ago to 30,000 cases as of this year. I can't see any evidence of any other winery in Australia matching that growth rate." Brown said Eden Road's Jimmy Watson win did a lot to put Hilltops on the map, but there was more to the region's success than that. "The terrific thing about Hilltops is that it is capable of producing a consumer-friendly style," he said. "It's medium-weight, it's got plenty of complexity, it's got a lot of interest, it's got heart and soul. It's a really attractive style to drink." When Brown bought Moppity, he saw Hilltops as "this little undiscovered gem. It's an exciting region. Our Shiraz really is unique. It's got a little more generosity than Canberra Shiraz. It's riper than Orange. In the last two years, the region has really started to emerge quite quickly." Brown intended for Moppity to be a contract vineyard which he could "pick the eyes out of". But he very quickly made the decision to be not just another fruit grower. "I believed it was holding the region back. It finishes up in the mass produced blends of the big boys. What a crying shame." So Brown now makes the Lock and Key range which sells for under \$15. "We're effectively putting out wines that should be at a \$25 price point... it's driving the business for us." The Estate range, including a Riesling and a Shiraz, sells for \$20 to \$25. There is also an enticing Reserve Shiraz, which won a trophy in the Top 100 Sydney International Wine Competition. Grove Estate's 2008 Cellar Block Shiraz Viognier also won a trophy.

Brown said Hilltops Riesling is terrific. "There's not much of it grown. There's really good natural acidity but we get some slightly exotic characters as well. Climatically, the Hilltops region compares with the Clare Valley quite well. The real buzz is over some of the Italian varieties."

Grove Estate has won a lot of acclaim for its Nebbiolo, and Moppity has put in two hectares of Nebbiolo. Brown also thinks there is a big future for Tempranillo. "We've got no problem ripening the fruit but it's not too warm that you lose the savoury, spice and elegance." This year Moppity will take about 10 to 12 per cent of its output from Tumbarumba. "There's another region I'm really excited about," he said. "It's got the potential to produce world-class Chardonnay. The media and judges are yet to see the best of that region."