

Penfolds releases 'golden' Grange plus whites from Adelaide Hills

THE RELEASE of Penfolds Grange, still indisputably the most iconic of Australia's wines despite growing competition for the title, is always greeted with enormous interest, both in Australia and in many other countries.

Penfolds' development of the Yattarna premium white has added to the magic of the annual release ceremony, while two or three (two in 2006) other super-premiums round out the gala.

It's a very special year for Grange, celebrating its 50th commercial vintage. While some people have suggested that isn't quite right, the fact is that the 1951 wine was only an experimental vintage, with the 1952 being the first commercial release.

2001 Penfolds Grange is only the second to be made with 100 per cent Barossa Valley fruit. It is described by Penfolds chief winemaker Peter Gago as "beautifully balanced," delivering on expectations. "The nose is immediately Grange: vibrant, youthful and lifted. A mix of tightly packed liquorice, freshly tanned leather and dark spices create a poised, controlled and distinctive wine."

Peak drinking, Gago suggested, would be from 2009 to 2038...if you can wait that long!

The 2003 Penfolds Yattarna Chardonnay is the first to be sourced 100 per cent from Adelaide Hills vineyards.

"We sourced from four growers - two in the Piccadilly Valley, one in Birdwood and one in Gumeracha," explained Gago. "This highlights the diversity of the Adelaide Hills and has allowed us to work with the many different micro-climates available in the region."

"This is another reason why this wine continues to evolve stylistically."

This year's two other super-premiums are the 2003 Penfolds RWT Barossa Valley Shiraz and 2002 Penfolds St Henri Shiraz. There is no Penfolds Bin 707 release from the 2003 vintage. Tradition demands that only Bin 707s exceeding a certain quality hurdle are released, a decision taken to maintain the quality and integrity of this superb cabernet sauvignon.



Red wine could be listed among 'dangerous goods'

I QUITE often carry a bottle or two of wine when I travel - taking it as a gift, bringing it home from a winery visit or because I spotted a bargain or a hard-to-find bottle in a wine store.

But if you're tempted to do the same, please be aware of the pitfalls.

I've never had a bottle break in my bag (touch wood) but I have twice had to help friends who did and in both cases the wine was red, writing off one woman's travelling wardrobe and causing almost as much havoc for the other victim.

Because of these incidents, I've since been wary of carrying red wine at all.

But if you must carry it with you, there are a few protective measures you can take that are easy, cheap and effective.

If it's going in a suitcase, first roll it in bubble wrap (easily purchased at a stationery outlet) and then wrap that package in a couple of plastic bags, topping and tailing. If there is a breakage at least the liquid will — theoretically — be contained.

Many stores or wineries will help with a carry box, usually for two or more bottles, but in some places you can purchase a purpose-designed courier pack.

Carrying a bottle in your briefcase or cabin bag can be a safer bet, but you need to weigh up the chances of damage to your notes, your laptop and whatever else you have with you.

Wineries are often happy to ship purchases home for you, but normally require a 12-bottle minimum — a mixed case can usually be organised although some wineries insist on single variety cases. A few are helpful with six-packs. If you decide to do this, however, first check the cost of shipping. I once shipped from the Barossa Valley without paying close attention to the quoted freight rate, only to realise later - much too late - that I was paying more for the transport than the wine.

As a rule, I'd advise against Champagne or sparkling in your suitcase.. Bags sometimes get quite rough treatment on loading or unloading. This isn't going to do the wine any good at all, especially Champagne, and it will be so unsettled it could possibly "explode" on opening even if left for days. - KK