

92 Oriel 2002 Saint-Emilion L'Exception (\$75) Smooth, ripe and fleshy with velvety texture and pure, fresh plum and berry fruit flavors.

HENRY WINE GROUP

94 Achával Ferrer 2004 Malbec Altamira, Mendoza (\$90) Loaded with blueberry, spice and racy acidity; lovely, pure, beautifully structured and incredibly long.

TGIC

WINE

BY THE GLASS & VALUE RECOMMENDATIONS



88 Smoking Loon 2005 Pinot Grigio, California (\$9) Edgy and crisp, clean and juicy with dry, racy acidity; fresh and quite pleasant.

WINE WAREHOUSE

88 La Yunta 2005 Torrontès, La Rioja (\$10) Smooth and rich with juicy, green grape flavors and good density; long, mineral and extracted with lovely balance and sophisticated style.

GARBER & COMPANY



88 Domaine de Bernier 2005 Chardonnay, Vin de Pays du Jardin de la France (\$10) Smooth and balanced with a crisp core of acidity; clean, fresh and juicy.

REGAL WINE COMPANY



88 Kendall-Jackson 2005 Vintner's Reserve Chardonnay, California (\$12) Smooth and luscious with ripe fruit and dense flavors that include sweet oak and vanilla.

REGAL WINE COMPANY

Heading for the Hills: Clarendon Hills

Nobody has ever accused Roman Bratasiuk of making wimpy wines. The blockbusters that come from his Clarendon Hills winery, founded in 1989, are known for being massively styled, heavily extracted monsters with the punch of a boxing kangaroo. Lately, Bratasiuk has been toning down his style a bit in the interest of achieving the "iron fist in a velvet glove" ideal, but these powerful reds - and only reds - are still among the most generously proportioned and meaty wines I've tasted all year.

Bratasiuk sources the fruit from neighboring growers in his neck of McLaren Vale, just south of Adelaide. This region was settled in the mid-19th century



and, after a short stint of wheat cultivation, was developed as vineyard land. Many of the vines are gnarled and twisted 70-year-old bush vines.

I sat down with Roman Bratasiuk recently to taste through the entire 2004 line-up. It was an impressive show. The bright, juicy Hickinbotham Vineyard Grenache (\$61, 91 points) delivers ripe blackberry, cassis and racy acidity and is bursting with fruit and minerals. Even better was the dense, chewy Romas Vineyard Grenache (\$100, 94 points), with massive berry fruit, vibrant acidity and mineral complexity.



I was less impressed with the three Cabernets and the single Merlot - handsome enough wines but somewhat overpriced. But all was forgiven when we got to the Syrahs, seven of them in all and each seemingly better than the last. Standouts include the explosive Brookman Vineyard Syrah (\$100, 94 points) with chocolate and spice notes, and the Piggott Vineyard Syrah (\$150, 95 points), which was massive but not heavy, with great complexity and amazing finesse. The silky smooth Astralis Vineyard Syrah (\$325, 97 points) is a worthy flagship, from vineyards planted in the 1930s. It shows lovely oak notes and concentrated berry flavors with loads of finesse and amazing style. Don't miss these wines!

The Clarendon Hills wines are distributed by Gallo.