

**2006 HERRIOT WINES
NATASCHA'S LATE-PICKED
RIESLING, MANJIMUP, WA \$18.50**

Manjimup, in the Karri forest of south-west Western Australia, is not the first region that springs to mind when you think of great riesling; Frankland River has a stronger reputation for it. But that may change if this, and the drier 2006 Herriot Riesling due for release this year, are anything to go by. Natascha is a glorious, biodynamic sweet riesling, full of freshness and zest.

Available from www.herriotwines.com.au.



**2006 VALHALLA WINES
MARSANNE, RUTHERGLEN, VIC \$22**

Valhalla Wines is a new winery in an old region — most Rutherglen vineyards are run by fifth-generation vigneron — and it's trying hard to reduce its environmental footprint.

Straw-bale cellars make air-conditioning almost unnecessary, and wastewater goes to a worm farm. The wines are lovely too. This is a rich, sweet and spicy white.

Available from www.valhallawines.com.au.



**2005 NGERINGA SYRAH,
ADELAIDE HILLS, SA \$40**

Erinn and Janet Klein's new Adelaide Hills winery is also in a straw-bale building. The Kleins source grapes from two vineyards that use biodynamic methods.

The 2005 pinot noir and chardonnay weren't quite up to the Ngeringa label and have been relegated to the \$25 JE label. This shiraz (or syrah, as it's often called) is juicy and deliciously peppery.

Available from www.ngeringa.com.



DIANE MILLER/PHOTOLIBRARY

All dried up?

The vast majority of Australia's vineyards are irrigated. In cooler regions, such as the Yarra Valley and Margaret River, vineyards can be grown using minimal supplementary irrigation. But in the hot, inland regions around Griffith in NSW, Mildura in Victoria and Renmark in South Australia — regions that between them produce more than two-thirds of the country's wine — vineyards rely almost wholly on water from the Murrumbidgee and Murray-Darling river systems to survive. And those rivers are drying up.

The unprecedented dry 2007 vintage was a stark illustration of what this could mean for the long-term future of Australia's wine industry. Drought-stressed vines produce lower yields and this year's national grape harvest was the smallest in seven years: around 1.3 million tonnes, down from 1.9 million in 2006. What's more, because the buds for next year's growing season are formed on the vine this year, the 2008 vintage looks like being even smaller, even if the heavens do finally decide to open over winter.

"As far as the industry is concerned this is probably a good thing — we've been in a situation of oversupply for a while now," says Mark McKenzie, Wine Grape Growers Australia executive director and member of the newly formed wine industry Drought Management Taskforce. But, he concedes, "it will have a dramatic effect on the livelihoods of individual producers."

Brian Zrna is typical of many Mildura grape-growers coping with dwindling water allocations. He is converting his 62-hectare vineyard from overhead spray to the much more efficient (but costly) under-vine drip irrigation. Even so, the drought — and five years of receiving unsustainably low prices for his grapes — have caught up with him.

"By this October, if we haven't got a reasonable water allocation, I'm going to have to just let a third of my vines die, because I can't afford to convert them to drip," he says.

The industry is beginning to address the plight of people like Brian Zrna. The Australian Society of Viticulture and Oenology, for example, has spent the past few months conducting drought-response workshops in wine regions across the country — and the workshops have so far attracted more than 800 people. McKenzie sees this as a positive aspect of the drought. "As much as you can have an upside in a crisis situation, one of the upsides is that it's forcing a much more collaborative approach to planning, with grape-growers and winemakers working together," he says.

MAX ALLEN is a celebrated wine writer with an interest in biodynamic and organic winegrowing.