

eat drink



2009 Brown Brothers Limited Release Vermentino (Victoria), \$19

Brown Brothers was one of the first Australian wineries to embrace varietal wines, introducing chardonnay and sauvignon blanc more than 30 years ago. They're still at the varietal forefront, as this vermentino shows. It's light and bright, with aromas of passionfruit, lemon pith and stonefruit and a crisp, dry finish.



2009 Chalmers Fiano (Murray Darling, NSW), \$27

The Chalmers family ran an influential vine nursery for more than 20 years, introducing many new varieties to the viticultural scene. Now focused on their eponymous brand, their fiano displays intense aromatics of spring blossom, white nectarine and lemon zest. It's fresh and lively with a tight, racy finish.



2010 First Drop Bella Coppia Arneis (Adelaide Hills, SA), \$25

The Adelaide Hills region provides the gentle climate necessary for this variety to show at its best and Matt Gant and John Retsas have done the rest. Freshness is the key, with lots of citrusy aromatics, juicy pear flavours and a minerally acid finish. It cries out for seafood – try it with salt-and-pepper squid.



2009 Chrismont La Zona Savagnin (King Valley, Victoria), \$23

Arnie Pizzini is one of the King Valley's pioneering growers and his vineyard places a special emphasis on Italian varieties. Here he has gone further afield with an exciting savagnin. It shows delicious white-peach and pink-grapefruit aromas with a hint of apricot kernel. The flavours are mouth-filling, enhanced by a touch of spice.



2010 Lark Hill Grüner Veltliner (Canberra District, NSW), \$45 cellar door

Hailing from Austria, grüner (as it's colloquially known) is an exciting new arrival. This is the second vintage from the Carpenter family at Lark Hill and it's a cracker. Aromatics of white pepper and ripe pear lead to a lush textural palate that is rich and intense yet remains deft and energetic.

Arneis, fiano, savagnin and vermentino are not your everyday white wines. But many industry insiders believe they soon will be. The vast majority of Australia's whites are made from French grape varieties sourced from cool or temperate regions of France – notably chardonnay, semillon and sauvignon blanc. But if you believe in climate change or simply read the news of drought and searing temperatures, of cyclones and floods, then you'll realise it's time to rethink.

Enter the Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show (AAVWS). It was established 10 years ago with the help of a prominent grapevine specialist, the late Dr Rod Bonfiglioli, who believed that Australia's viticultural future lay with Mediterranean grape varieties that would thrive (not wilt) in our warm growing conditions. The AAVWS is held in early November at Mildura in the Murray Darling region, the engine room of our commercial winegrowing. It's an apt location – if these new varieties are to survive and thrive, it's essential that they adapt to our growing conditions.

These new-wave whites are well suited to our climate and are not overt or ponderous – rather, they are wines to slurp down with oysters, prawns, white-fleshed fish and salads. They're best enjoyed now and are perfect wines for Sydney's clear, bright autumn days.

Vermentino is an excellent example. Hailing from the warm Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and Sicily, it is equally enjoyable with a caesar salad or Thai chicken curry. And it's already showing well in a wide range of climatic conditions, from the Hunter Valley and Mudgee (di Lusso has a beauty) to central Victoria and the Murray Darling

(the Trentham Estate La Famiglia is thrilling). Vermentino is also low-ish in alcohol, rarely exceeding 12.5 per cent.

Fiano, from Campania, the area around Naples, is similarly fresh, featuring elements of nashi pear and pink grapefruit. Growers are scattered from Mount Tamborine in Queensland (the Witches Falls is especially good) through Rutherglen and the Murray Darling (again) in Victoria and McLaren Vale and Adelaide Hills in South Australia.

Arneis hails from Piedmont and prefers a cooler site, similar to its homeland. Here, it's performing really well in Victoria – the King Valley (Dal Zotto, Pizzini, Chrismont), the Yarra Valley (Mac Forbes) and the Mornington Peninsula (Port Philip Estate, Crittenden Estate). Its ripe pear and musk flavours are perfect with fried whitebait and aioli.

Savagnin is a problem child because it came to Australia in 1989 under the guise of albariño, a Spanish variety mooted to be the "next big thing". Oops. DNA checks later revealed the Spanish had mistakenly sent savagnin cuttings, a variety from France's Jura region. Still, savagnin is delicious and grows well in a range of regions, including the humid Shoalhaven (try Coolangatta Estate in NSW), the warm Langhorne Creek and McLaren Vale in South Australia and the cooler King Valley and Strathbogie Ranges in Victoria.

These are but a few fledgling white varieties; there are more, such as grüner veltliner, waiting in the wings. You'll need to search them out – the AAVWS website (aavws.com) is a good starting point – or seek the advice of your local retailer or sommelier. And new red varieties? Yes, there are plenty of those, too – but that's a story for another issue.

wine

new-wave whites

It's time to look beyond the tried and trusted, writes **Peter Bourne**.

Photography **Jennifer Soo**