

## Going green can be a test for any winemaker but organic wine delivers wonderful flavours, writes Peter Bourne.

Photography Amanda Prior

**Clean and green is the mantra of today.** Carbon credits, renewable energy and sustainable agriculture are the buzz words. Wine is an agricultural industry and to address environmental concerns, thoughtful winegrowers are moving towards organic viticulture, with a significant number of them embracing biodynamics.

Many wine consumers confuse the terms organic, biodynamic and preservative-free. Organics and biodynamics are agricultural practices that can be applied to any crop – including the vine. Preservative-free wines are those made without the use of sulphur dioxide, the ancient winemaking input that ensures the wines we drink have fresh, bright fruit flavours and don't (quickly) turn to vinegar.

Organics is about what growers cannot do; biodynamics is more about what they should do. Organic farming methods preclude the use of chemical fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides, with natural sprays based on copper and sulphur used to control disease. Pests are managed by biological means, with various techniques used to promote soil health.

Biodynamics is based on principles established in 1924 by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, who advocated a system that emphasises manure and compost – and an astrological approach to planting and harvesting based on the phases of the moon and the stars.

It was really only last century, with the introduction of chemically based fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, that farming techniques changed radically from the centuries before. When peace came at the end of World War I, explosives producers lost their main markets and turned their focus to agriculture as the world struggled to feed the millions left starving after the devastation visited upon the British and European countryside.

Winegrowers around the world were inspired to try these revolutionary products, which promised to increase yields and protect vines from the unpredictability of nature. In Australia, the 20th century saw irrigation open up vast tracts of formerly barren land to intense farming.

Baby boomers discovered wine in the '60s and '70s and the industry exploded, with chemically based fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides the tools of the trade. But along the way, many everyday drinking wines lost character and personality – the very things that set wine apart from other alcoholic drinks.

Fortunately, at the same time there has been a growing number of small, often family-owned wineries making handcrafted, individual wines in a bid to differentiate themselves from the big players. It's these niche growers that have driven the move to more sustainable agricultural practices.

But don't think all big producers are ignoring the "clean green" push. At the recent 2009 Organic Wine Show, Yalumba won one of only three gold medals with the Yalumba Organic Viognier 2008 – from an organic vineyard in South Australia's Riverland. The Angove family also produces organic wines in the Riverland.

With the growing interest in organics and biodynamics, it makes marketing sense to follow the sustainable path. It's a path that also leads to wines that celebrate vintage variation and deliver more flavour, have more character and rejoice in their unique personality.



wine  
organics



**Temple Bruer Shiraz Malbec 2007 (Langhorne Creek, SA), \$20**

Gold Medal, Best Red and Best Preservative-free Wine at the 2009 Organic Wine Show. David and Barbara Bruer's small vineyard is based on organic principles and this wine has a dense, earthy bouquet with lots of black fruits, dark chocolate, cinnamon stick and nutmeg.



**Thistle Hill Riesling 2009 (Mudgee, NSW), \$26**

Gold Medal, Best White and Best Wine of the 2009 Organic Wine Show. Dave and Lesley Robinson have farmed Thistle Hill organically since 1975. This is a true beauty of a riesling: fresh, bright and finely honed, with aromas of lemon blossom and red apple spice.



**Gemtree Bloodstone Tempranillo, 2007 (McLaren Vale, SA), \$26**

The Buttery family went biodynamic in 2007 in a brave but successful move, as this tempranillo demonstrates. It's only medium-weight but packed with sweet fruit and fine tannins. Peppery spices mingle with smells of blackberries and liquorice.



**Sorrenberg Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2008 (Beechworth, Vic), \$35**

Jan and Barry Morey farm a tiny vineyard in the Beechworth hills, where Barry finds composting an exhilarating experience. His wines are equally exciting, possessing depth and soul. Here, fresh herbs, nectarine and wild honey lead to a palate of immense intensity.



**Cullen Kevin John Chardonnay 2007 (Margaret River, WA), \$77**

Vanya Cullen is a follower of Steiner's biodynamic principles. This chardonnay is dedicated to her winegrower father – and what a wine! Packed with exotic smells, its flavours run from stone fruits to wet stones and flint with an incredible acid structure.

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