

Good drinking

Wine Huon Hooke

Riesling above the rest

One of the country's favourite brands is pursuing a new and distinctly upmarket direction

Spot the apparent contradiction in this statement: we are in the Pewsey Vale vineyard, eating lunch beside Jacob's Creek. Yep: Jacob's Creek is an Orlando brand and the eponymous creek runs across the main road through the Barossa Valley at Rowland Flat - Orlando's home base. And Pewsey Vale is a Yalumba vineyard in the hills about 250 metres directly above Rowland Flat - technically in the Eden Valley region.

But it's true, the trickle of clear water running through Pewsey is the headwaters of the Jacob's Creek. But we are so close to Rowland Flat as the crow flies, you could probably jump off Pewsey in a hang-glider and alight beside Orlando's Jacob's Creek Visitors Centre a few moments later.

Pewsey is at 500 metres, and the Barossa floor about 250.

That extra altitude means cooler nights, average temperatures a couple of degrees lower and a harvest that's three to four weeks later.

The result is much finer, more delicate and higher-acid white wines. A fact that wasn't lost on Wyncham Hill Smith when he replanted Pewsey Vale in 1961-2, mostly to riesling vines. (Pewsey

Vale's first incarnation was under the ownership of Joseph Gilbert, who planted in 1847.)

Today, Pewsey Vale could be said to be enjoying its third coming. It has been a discount brand,

inexpensive, in cut-cases in every chain store and, coincidentally, one of the best bargains in the country. Now it's

supporting a slightly higher price and the winemakers have dropped the sweetness level commensurately.

The Pewsey brand is more respected: could it have something to do with the fact that the very ordinary Pewsey Vale cabernet has been dropped?

And a pinot gris and a gewurztraminer have arrived in its place? And could it have anything to do with the



Local legend ... Pewsey Vale's Louisa Rose. Photo: The Yalumba Wine Company

advent of The Contours, an old-vine Pewsey Vale riesling which every year since 1995 has come off the oldest vines, planted along curvy contours in an age when the soil was habitually cultivated, creating its own enemy, erosion?

Retail watch

Specialist wine storage provider Wine Ark has joined the retailing business. Members of its cellar club have received regular email offers which, like many independent retailers using email promotions, seem to focus heavily on small parcels of rare, blockbuster South Australian reds with high prices and Parker points. Wine Ark's latest concerns Barossa vineyard, **Schulz**, a key grower for Torbreck, now selling some of its own wines. www.wine-ark.com.