

# drops

Jeni Port

wine  
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# The lean team

It seems every wine has its day – today  
it's Barossa Valley shiraz  
but tomorrow ...

Looking reinvigorated after taking last year off, former Taltarni manager and chief wine maker **Dominique Portet** (pictured below) has popped up in the Yarra Valley. Portet has leased a small corner of the very large Yering Station winery near Yarra Glen and is having great fun playing around with some Yarra Valley fruit he sourced from the 2000 vintage, including (of course) cabernet sauvignon. After moving house from Ballarat to Hawthorn two weeks ago, Portet and his wife, Julia, appear to have severed their last formal ties with the Pyrenees region, home for the past 25 years. He's not discounting a future in the Yarra Valley, although efforts at looking for land in the area have raised his Gallic eyebrows. "It is very expensive, you know." We know!



Got a problem with mould attacking wine labels in your cellar? Or perhaps you've just enjoyed a stupendous bottle of old red and you're bursting to tell someone, anyone? Well, there's plenty of wine talk to share with total strangers who do care through [www.wine-ark.com](http://www.wine-ark.com). The website, set up to offer free advice on wine cellar issues, recently put out a feeler for interest in a monthly e-mail news letter on cellaring and received more than 2500 responses. The first newsletter in June covered a surprising amount of wine territory, with an invitation to talk about old vintages of Cape Mentelle wines, a list of up-and-coming wines waiting to be discovered (including Picanly pinot noir and Grosset Piccadilly chardonnay), a Q&A on mouldy wine labels, and a review of a Sydney tasting held by wine-ark. Wine-ark is a Sydney-based wine storage specialist, which has just set up an alliance with similar specialists Liquid Assets in Melbourne and Vin Safe in Perth. [www.wine-ark.com](http://www.wine-ark.com) or Liquid Assets, Abbotsford, on 9415 8801.

Sydney-based Master of Wine, Nick Balleid, burst into print in September with a **Hunter Valley wine guide**. The guide will follow a similar format to that of the **Yarra Valley Wine Guide** published by Boyce Pizzey in 1999 and will cover 130 wine companies in the valley, their history and tasting notes of present vintages. The Hunter and Yarra Valley guides will be the first of a nationwide wine guide series in development by Boyce Pizzey.

Name Australia's glamorous, big-ticket shiraz and what will they have in common, apart from telephone number prices?

There's Henschke Hill of Grace, Penfolds Grange, Grant Burge Meschach, Elderton Command, Magpie Estates The Malcolm, Barossa Valley Estates Ebenezer, Rockford Basket Press Shiraz, St Hallett Old Block and Peter Lehmann Stonewell.

We can't get enough of those big, luscious reds and neither can the Americans nor the British. The common denominator? The Barossa Valley.

And to think only 17 years ago Barossa shiraz had reached the lowest point imaginable, as a white-wine-induced red depression sunk its stocks so low the grape was being sold off for sweet sherry or, at its nadir, for breakfast muffins.

But as the Barossa's star has risen, so another's has hit something of a rough patch.

Hunter Valley shiraz – lean, wiry, earthy and proud of it – has all but been replaced in our hearts and minds.

Which makes you feel for a wine maker such as Brokenwood's Iain Riggs. He's trying to stem the Barossa tide with a great Australian shiraz, Brokenwood's Graveyard Shiraz (\$75), but the recognition is paltry compared with the rapture and prices achieved by Barossa reds such as Hill of Grace (\$170), Burge's Meschach (\$30) and Magpie Estates The Malcolm (\$98).

Personally, Riggs says he is happy to sell all he produces in his loyal Sydney market, but he promises the Hunter's time will come again.

He's just not saying when. "The Barossa deserves the recognition," says Riggs, a maker with a nice-guy reputation throughout the wine industry. He is a regular judge at the Barossa Wine Show too, so he is only too aware of the competition.

"Their wines are big, soft, ripe and generous and carry American oak with ease," he explains. "It's what people expect to see, whereas the Hunter Valley is a different kettle of fish. It's earthy, leathery, tarry and lower alcohol."