



Clockwise from opposite page: The glorious Montalto Vineyard & Olive Grove; Nestled within Crittenden Estate is Stillwater, a modern vineyard restaurant; Local winemaker and industry legend Kathleen Quealy; Cape Schanck Boardwalk; The Mornington Farmers Market; Rollo, Garry and Zoe Crittenden.

MEET THE WINEMAKER BARNABY FLANDERS

As far as Barnaby Flanders is concerned, Garagiste is an “accidental business”. The winemaker was plying his trade at the peninsula’s Moorooduc Estate in 2003 when, on a whim, he invested in two tonnes of excess pinot noir fruit to “play around” with. “I had no intention to start my own business,” says Flanders. “Now, 16 years down the track, we’re going. ‘Wow, we’ve got all these assets, we’re leasing vineyards and wineries...’

“It was one of those sliding doors moments.” As the name suggests, Garagiste is a small-batch winery where experimentation is de rigueur. Certainly, you will find pinot noir and chardonnay on the wine list – it is the Mornington Peninsula after all – but it is Barnaby’s pursuit of alternative styles that has caught the eye of many of his contemporaries. One such outlier is aligoté. ‘The other white grape’ of Burgundy, aligoté hasn’t gained much traction in Australia, but the plant’s resilience in cool climates makes it a good match for the peninsula.

There are just three plantings of aligoté in Australia. The oldest and ‘largest’ (it’s a mere three rows) belongs to Hickinbotham of Dromana, where Barnaby sources his fruit.

Aligoté is traditionally Garagiste’s smallest batch and can be difficult, although not impossible, to get your hands on. Of course, your best bet is onsite. Garagiste doesn’t have a cellar door, but tastings can be arranged by appointment. garagiste.com.au

GOOD MORNINGTON

A second wave of planting in the 1980s catapulted Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula into the consciousness of oenophiles. Four decades later, this relative newcomer has become one of Australia’s favourite wine regions.

WORDS BY KATE SYMONS

When Garry and Margaret Crittenden first started talking about pinot noir in the early 1980s, a pattern of confusion quickly emerged. ‘Pinot what?’ was the typical response among local friends and acquaintances. Likewise, many were baffled by the Crittendens’ decision to plant vines – of any kind – in the Mornington Peninsula, a region with little wine cred at the time.

Inspired by a trip to Tasmania a few years earlier, and a particularly memorable, yet utterly surprising gewürztraminer, the Crittendens could not be deterred. “I knew there was a whole new world out here,” recalls Garry. He was right. Crittenden Estate is now a major player in the Australian wine industry and the



GOOD FRUIT

The Crittenden Estate mantra is that great wines must start in the vineyard and they’re committed to non-chemical management of the vines, driven by creating natural disease resistance in the vineyard, resulting in healthier vines and fruit.

Mornington Peninsula is firmly embedded as one of the country’s favourite wine regions. And the pinot noir that locals were once so dubious about has played a starring role.

WEIRD SCIENCE

An hour’s drive southeast of Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula is on the up and up as a tourism destination and this is heavily driven by the region’s rich wine offering. According to the 2019 Mornington Peninsula Visitor Journeys Report, visitor numbers have jumped 39 per cent since 2012. Meanwhile, 2018-19 data puts the Mornington Peninsula second behind the Margaret Valley as Australia’s most-visited wine region.

As well as the vineyard-dotted landscape and resulting wine catalogue, the glittering beaches,

noteworthy dining scene, luxurious stays and charming townships strengthen the pull. Yet, when the Crittendens planted their first vines in 1982, the picture was vastly different.

A horticulturalist by trade, Garry Crittenden had studied the climate data and drawn the parallel between the peninsula and the famed French wine region of Bordeaux, the spiritual home of cabernet sauvignon. The Crittendens stuck to the science, planting two hectares comprising predominantly cab sav, as well as chardonnay and a little pinot noir. In doing so, they doubled the Mornington Peninsula’s area under vine.

The science, though, turned out to be deceptive and the region’s cool climates proved better suited to the grapes of Burgundy – pinot noir and



chardonnay. But don’t visit the peninsula expecting a French-style drop, says Garry: “We have our own unique interpretation of pinot noir. The climate and the soils superimpose their character on the grapevine and hence, the fruit that you harvest.

“A common mistake that not only industry people make, but wine lovers make, is that their benchmark for pinot noir is Burgundy. It’s taken a long time for growers and the public to shrug off that shackle.”

WHAT’S THE ALTERNATIVE?

The Mornington Peninsula is a nuanced region, the diversity of climate, soil structure, rainfall and altitude giving each vineyard its own terroir. Unlike landlocked Burgundy, the peninsula is surrounded by water on three sides – Bass Strait, Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay – and the maritime influence has played a vital role.



There are limitations – some varieties simply will not bear fruit – but within the boundaries as set by the peninsula’s microclimates, magic is possible. Explains local winemaker and industry legend Kathleen Quealy, “If you are in a marginal site, there is a possibility that you can make wine that’s very, very fine with great flavour and maybe spend a little bit more time perfecting the technique of growing the grapes.

“When you come to a cool marginal climate like the Mornington Peninsula, there is a magnification of quality based on site selection, the vintage, and the work and ability of the viticulturist and the winemaker.

“People who love travelling around the cellar doors, they love to discover that. The idea sneaks up on them.”

With Kevin McCarthy, Quealy is one half of the wife-and-husband team that founded T’Gallant in the peninsula in 1990. They sold the business to Treasury Estate Wines in 2003, but not before shining the spotlight on pinot gris/grigio. The couple now run the Quealy label.

Such is her influence, Quealy was once dubbed the ‘Queen of Pinot Grigio’ by wine critic James Halliday,



Clockwise from above: The Pt Leo Estate sculpture Park; Whisky distillery Chief’s Son; Red Hill Brewery; Bathing boxes at Mornington Peninsula are a major drawcard.

TOP DROPS

In a search for fantastic Mornington Peninsula wine, you certainly won’t go begging. Here are a few worth seeking out with brief comments from the winemakers about what to look out for and what the wine means to them.



2019 QUEALY MUSK CREEK VINEYARD PINOT GRIS

A wine that is “a slow avalanche of honey, with great depth and viscosity that finishes long and dry and poised”.



TEN MINUTES BY TRACTOR MCCUTCHEON CHARDONNAY 2018

“One of our favourite wines from the 2018 vintage”, this wine has peach, lemon curd and quince flavours.



2019 GARAGISTE TUERONG ALIGOTÉ

Focusing on chardonnay and pinot noir, they have bottled the dry, white French grape variety aligoté “as an alternative to chardonnay”.



2018 PORT PHILLIP ESTATE SINGLE VINEYARD RED HILL CHARDONNAY

“Citrus notes of orange, tangelo, and lemon peel with suggestions of flint and oatmeal on the nose.”



2019 CRITTENDEN ESTATE CRI DE COEUR PINOT NOIR

“This is the pinnacle of our family’s passion for winemaking on the beautiful Mornington Peninsula.”

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANSON SMART

and while a reminder of that compliment conjures a giggle – “That was nice of him, wasn’t it?” – she retains the crown to this day.

“Pinot gris, like pinot noir and chardonnay, suits this region because it’s able to retain its power and delicacy at the same time,” she says. “Part of that is its ability to hold its own natural acids and that is because we’re in this cool maritime region.

“People come here to drink pinot gris. It’s so beautiful and it’s so soft and fine and expressive. People fall into it ... thank God!”

It has been decades since Quealy battled to bring pinot gris into the mainstream – the first T’Gallant pinot gris was made in ‘92 – and she is still advocating alternative varieties. Friulano and pobblebonk (yes, pobblebonk) are both currently in the Quealy portfolio.

On the subject of alternatives, the Mornington Peninsula can also deliver beyond the vines.

DISTIL MY BEATING HEART

Today, the Mornington Peninsula is home to more than 200 vineyards, with around 60 wineries and more than 50 cellar doors. This is wine country, to be sure, but the rise of craft breweries and artisan distilleries is steep.

Located in Somerville, whisky distillery Chief’s Son is part of this growing network. Co-founder Stuart McIntosh, who established the distillery with his wife, Naomi, in 2003, says the sense of place in the peninsula allows makers to thrive.

“The provenance is amazing,” he says. “It’s a beautiful place with calm weather and a lot of like-minded craft people with the space and time to do



VALE MARGARET CRITTENDEN
1942-2020

Among his many accolades, Garry Crittenden was inducted as a ‘Legend’ by the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival in 2003. Since then, he has never wavered from the opinion that his wife Margaret would have been a worthier recipient.

“She was way ahead of me in terms of her vision and her ideas. She got an idea and went ahead and did it,” says Garry. Case in point, in 1988, armed with a notepad, pen and cash tin, Margaret set up a trestle table in Crittenden’s winery building, creating the peninsula’s first ‘cellar door’. She spearheaded various projects since, including the region’s first cellar door restaurant and the property’s Lakeside Villas.

Margaret died in November 2020 after a long illness.

what they need to do. We still have the tourism board saying we’re a food and wine region, but ... we’re food and beverage. It’s a craft network here.”

This ‘craft network’ can be seen through various regional collaborations. BoatShed Cheese, for example, use Chief’s Son whisky in the maturation process of its washed-rind cheese, Compass Gold; Cuveé Chocolate is using Chief’s Son whisky in the production of two work-in-progress products; and the special batch Cane ‘n Grain is a result of the relationship between JimmyRum (cane) and Chief’s Son (grain).

Of course, you can also drink whisky, straight up.

PASSING THE BATON

With a 78th birthday pending, Garry Crittenden has taken a back seat at Crittenden Estate with much of the day-to-day management conducted by the second generation, siblings Rollo and Zoe Crittenden. Rollo is chief winemaker, responsible for the very vineyard he helped plant as a child, and he has made his mark.

In 2010, he was named Australian ‘Young Gun’ Winemaker of the Year. A decade later and he was at the helm to accept the 2020 BRIT/FIVS gong as ‘The world’s most sustainable winery’. Crittenden Estate’s commitment to sustainable farming practices goes back more than 10 years.

Rollo has continued to produce Crittenden’s classic French and Italian varieties (Halliday described his 2015 Cri de Coeur savagnin as “quite possibly the most exciting white wine in the country” and has introduced Spanish-style wines under the Los Hermanos label.

He believes it is the combination of revered traditions and fresh ideas that keeps the energy in the industry. “Speaking for myself, my dad was always very broad in his thinking, always keen to experiment in winemaking. He’s actually encouraged me to explore and evolve and move. So, I think that’s the next generation coming through. We’re certainly seeing the industry on the Mornington Peninsula go to another level.”

VISIT MINDFOOD.COM

World Heritage Sites of Australia showcases the history, importance and future outlook for Australia’s 19 sites of major cultural, natural, ecological and historical significance. mindfood.com/australian-heritage-sites

WINE & DINE

Premium dining is a hallmark of wine regions the world over. The Mornington Peninsula is no exception. Here is a non-exhaustive shortlist of the region’s finest cellar door restaurants.

Laura (pictured above)

Named for the striking seven-metre-high sculpture it overlooks, Laura is the fine-dining operation at Pt Leo Estate and has two hats to prove it. Chef Phil Wood is at the helm and his menu is innovative and precise, and a genuine celebration of local produce.

ptleoestate.com.au/laura

Rare Hare

Jackalope Hotel’s Doot Doot Doot restaurant has received plenty of fanfare, and it’s warranted, but the high-end eatery’s more casual neighbour, Rare Hare, deserves the limelight, too. Especially in this instance, since it’s technically the cellar door restaurant. Relaxed yet refined describes both the food and the atmosphere.

rarehare.com.au

Polperro

Sophisticated service in a stylish setting and a seasonal menu that won’t disappoint, Polperro has been consistently delivering this lofty standard for years.

polperrowines.com.au

Ten Minutes by Tractor

With Noma and Fat Duck on his CV, it’s no surprise to find Chef Adam Sanderson doing delicious things in the Ten Minutes kitchen. Expect a delicate touch and anti-waste philosophy.

tenminutesbytractor.com.au

Paringa Estate

The second of the Mornington Peninsula’s two two-hatted restaurants, Paringa Estate is a culinary stalwart. Head Chef Simon Tarlington (ex-Quay, among others) runs a four-course menu with modern European leanings, plus glorious vineyard views from every seat.

paringaestate.com.au