

# “Go South!”

## AS AUSTRALIA HEATS UP, TASMANIA IS BECOMING THE PLACE TO GROW GRAPES

by Jim McMahon

**TASMANIA IS A SMALL, LUSH AND** beautiful island (similar in size to Ireland) southeast of mainland Australia, separated by a 150-mile stretch of water known as Bass Strait. The British established a penal colony here in 1803, although the indigenous people had settled the land 30,000 years before that. Today Tasmania, an Australian state, has a population of slightly over 512,000 people, with manufacturing, agriculture and food, wine and eco-tourism being key drivers.

Tasmania's first vineyard was planted by Bartholomew Broughton in 1823 at Prospect Farm in New Town near Hobart, the capital. It is a well-known fact that vine cuttings from Tasmania produced the first recorded vines in the Hunter Valley, north of Sydney, in 1832 and the first vineyards in both Victoria and South Australia. Tasmania, therefore, can legitimately claim to be the oldest wine region in the country. In addition, the first known Australian sparkling wine was produced in Tasmania from the 1826 harvest.

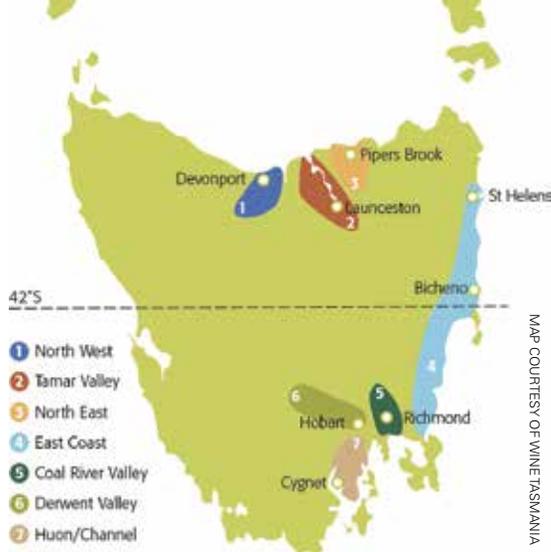
By the mid-1800s there were a number of commercial vineyards around the state, though vineyards had all but disappeared by the late 1800s after this brave early start. It wasn't until 1956 that the modern revival commenced, with vineyards being planted to a wide range of varieties including Pinot Noir, the first two being La Provence (now Providence) in the Pipers River and Moorilla, which is still operating in the Derwent Valley. In 1986 there were 116 acres of vines producing 170 tons of fruit; today there are close to 4,448 acres planted across 200 vineyards, which produce an average of 8,940 tons annually. Tasmania is the only cool-climate wine-producing state in Australia, with seven

distinct wine growing regions (see map).

Like the U.S., Australia is affected by climate change and the El Niño effect. 2015 will go down as the hottest year on record. Here in Australia and New Zealand, we have a double whammy: the effects of climate change as well as a gaping hole in the ozone layer. These factors will have a dramatic impact on viticulture, especially on the Australian mainland. In contrast, Tasmania's size and latitude has meant that its micro-climates have changed little over the last couple of centuries. As a result, mainland Australian winemakers are being encouraged to move south and invest in Tasmanian vineyards. The buzz word now is “Go South!”—and a number of Australian wine companies and winemakers, both big and small, have done just that.

Treasury Wines Estates has invested in Heemskerk in the Pipers River region and also sources grapes from the Coal River and Derwent Valley regions. Five years ago Brown Bothers of Milawa (Victoria) purchased a total 740 acres in the Tamar Valley and East Coast. Brown Bothers CEO Ross Brown said he was sufficiently alarmed by climate change to have started locating production of cooler-climate varieties to Tasmania: “As the vineyards warm up, a few of the varieties we are currently growing won't be viable in those vineyards in ten to 15 years' time.”

Young gun Nick Glaetzer, who hails from a long line of Barossa Valley winemakers dating back to 1888, has moved from the Barossa to Tasmania to make cool-climate Glaetzer/Dixon wines. Moorilla Estate was the second winery to be established outside Hobart in 1958. Today their Canadian winemaker, Conor van der Reest, is integral in rebuilding the winery and its vineyards/



brands from the ground up. Alain Rousseau, a French winemaker at Frogmore Creek (also outside Hobart), saw the potential for cool-climate viticulture when he migrated from France in 1991. This winery is a joint venture between Tony Scherer of Tasmania and Jack Kidwiler of California. Swiss winemaker Peter Althaus was another who saw the future potential of making cool-climate wines outside his native Switzerland and established his vineyards/winery at Campania near Hobart; he makes straight Cabernet and Bordeaux-style blends for his Domain A and Lady A labels. Stefano Lubiana of Lubiana Wines also moved from the mainland to focus on cool-climate winemaking in Grantham outside Hobart.

Sparkling winemaker and climate studies expert Dr. Andrew Pirie, with his up-market Apogee label, is another mainlander who saw the potential of making cool-climate wines (especially for Pinot Noir) in Tasmania. Pirie, together with Fred Peacock of Bream Creek Southern Tasmania, know more about the state, its soils, climates and viticultural practices than anyone else in the Tasmanian wine industry. Jansz/Dalrymple (part of the Hill-Smith Family Vineyards) bought into Tasmania in 2012. Jeremy Dineen winemaker at Josef Chromy Wines has invested heavily in all aspects of his Reilba vineyard (outside Launceston) and is meeting the challenges of climate change head-on with a number of winery and viticultural practices in place.

I have no doubt that the wine community of Tasmania welcomes any vinous interloper who wishes to invest in their state, either mainlander or world traveller. If you're serious about looking at long-term sustainable viticulture, take a good look at Tasmania. S|