

FOCUS: DISTRICTS OF VICTORIA

Our blind panels tasted **42** new-release wines from Victoria for this issue. **Joshua Greene**, our critic for Australia, rated **22** as exceptional (90+) and **3** as Best Buys. *Subscribers can find a complete list of wines tasted, and all reviews, at wineandspiritsmagazine.com.*

WHITE

CHARDONNAY

95 | Joshua Cooper \$60
2018 Macedon Ranges The Old Port Rich Chardonnay Joshua Cooper grew up at his family's vineyard, Cobaw Ridge, a high-altitude site in the Macedon Ranges that his parents farm under biodynamics. In 2012, he started using their facilities to make his own wines, purchasing grapes from neighbors who shared a farming philosophy. This wine comes from some of the first chardonnay planted in the region, the vines now 36 years old, growing in Cambrian soils with patches of granite at an altitude close to 2,000 feet. The concentration of the fruit, at 1.4 tons per acre, sets up the initial dark-toned flavor, a complex mix of struck match, malt, rice and orange spice. With air, a youthful energy takes over, delivering fresh flavors of peach fuzz, tart apricot and lasting chamomile savor. It's a substantial wine that feels sprightly and keeps getting better over the course of a week. Regrettably, there are only 125 cases for the world. If you find some, cellar it. *Vine Street Imports, Mount Laurel, NJ*

94 | Bindi \$74
2018 Macedon Ranges Kostas Rind Chardonnay The vines for this wine were 30 years old in 2018, 3.7 acres of chardonnay planted in volcanic soils with some quartz (Michael Dhillon uses the most quartz-rich sector of the vineyard for his Quartz Chardonnay, also recommended here). Spontaneously fermented and aged in French oak barrels (25 percent new), this wine completely melds that oak influence into its nuanced depths of flavor—quince and white cranberry, some ginger and lime, all of it coming together in a complexity that feels naked and clean, with the petrichor scent of a cooling rain. An exciting New World chardonnay, expressing its soil with delicacy and precision. *Vine Street Imports, Mount Laurel, NJ*

93 | Bindi \$120
2017 Macedon Ranges Quartz Chardonnay Of the five acres of chardonnay the Dhillon family planted in 1988, this 1.25-acre block has a greater incidence of shattered quartz in the soil. The yields are extremely

low, and Michael Dhillon allows the wine a bit more new oak (35 percent of the barrels) than he does in his Kostas Rind Chardonnay. This wine's depth of flavor is almost meaty, with a mineral rub to its spicy power. Panelist Michael Kowalski compared those flavors to a savory pastry shell with rosemary, suggesting a match with lobster Connecticut-style, with drawn butter and tarragon. The gracious, youthfully reductive notes of persimmon and green herb would also complement a shellfish stew in a combination of mineral tension and satisfying richness. *Vine Street Imports, Mount Laurel, NJ*

93 | Joshua Cooper \$60
2018 Macedon Ranges Cope Williams Chardonnay Tight and youthful, this wine yields its flavors several days after the bottle is first opened, going from tart lemon, lemongrass and scallion toward fresh, succulent pear and peach flavors. The fruit has the cooling clarity of a summer rain, though it takes a long time to arrive at that clarity. Based on its stubborn but measured resistance to oxygen, this should evolve well. *Vine Street Imports, Mount Laurel, NJ*

91 | Handpicked Wines \$50
2015 Yarra Valley Collection Chardonnay This wine's aroma is all about stylized reduction—a fashionable, flinty scent of struck match that some chardonnay winemakers encourage by maintaining a lot of solids in their fermenting juice. Just past that matchstick character, there's a lot of caramelized white peach and toasted brioche, along with pithy grapefruit acidity. Decant this and shake it up to let some of its power blow off and you'll have a gentle giant of a chardonnay, a savory white with grapefruit, sweet apple and salty earth notes. *American Spirits Exchange, Bridgeport, PA*

RED

BLENDS

90 | Levantine Hill \$140
2015 Yarra Valley Melange Traditional Samantha's Paddock Paul Bridgeman makes this wine from a steep, rocky slope that took seven months to plant, requiring a drilling rig with a diamond bit. The vines

include cabernet sauvignon, merlot, malbec, cabernet franc and petit verdot presented in a tight and spicy blend; rather than vegetal, it's vibrant in its restrained ripeness. The tannins have a cracked-green-peppercorn spice, as well as a hard edge—like the feel of a young xinomavro from Naoussa in Greece. Structured to age, it would also mellow in the company of merguez sausages. *MHW Ltd., Manhasset, NY*

DURIF

91 | Campbells \$28
2016 Rutherglen Durif (Best Buy) Farming eight acres of durif planted in iron-rich loam, Malcolm and Colin Campbell work this often stubbornly tannic variety to produce a wine that's accessible when young, and this 2016 is markedly elegant, its tannic intensity apparent, but not completely blunting the equally potent black-cherry fruit. Spicy and powerful rather than complex, this could take on slow-braised short ribs, or take a long rest in the cellar. *Negociants USA/Winebow Imports, NY*

NEBBIOLO

92 | Luke Lambert \$60
2017 Yarra Valley Nebbiolo Luke Lambert makes this wine from a block at the Denton Vineyard, on the north side of the Yarra River in Yarra Glen. It's a northwest-facing slope where nebbiolo ripens in sandy soils derived from the granite rock underneath; the vines were ten years old when Lambert made this 2017. It's an idiosyncratic nebbiolo, with scents of rose and hibiscus along with other volatile esters from a fermentation without temperature control or added yeasts. As one panelist noted, "It's screaming for air." Given a day with some oxygen, the finish is beautiful, expanding on lean red raspberry and porcini savor, a glimpse of the wine's grace and staying power. Splash it into a decanter hours before dinner, or cellar for a few years. *Vine Street Imports, Mount Laurel, NJ*