



wine

## end to hostilities

**ROB INGRAM AND THE ANTI CHARDONNAY FORCES CAPITULATE TO SPECTACULAR NEW WINES FROM NSW'S COWRA REGION.**

**IT'S WITH A SENSE** of inevitability that I record the passing of the ABC Movement. Once it united a group of wine scribes who proclaimed 'Anything But Chardonnay' in a mission to break its stranglehold on white wine consumption. They wanted to promote the appeal of other varieties in the hope of knocking the chardonnay off its perpetual perch and creating more drinking diversity.

Sauvignon blanc has increased in popularity and pinot gris, pinot grigio and viognier have gained a degree of trendiness, but chardonnay has clearly brushed off the challenge, and is even beginning to win back the respect of the ABC reactionaries.

More interesting is the fact that many of the better performers are coming out of left field as opposed to the more fashionable regions. The cooler regions of Western Australia, the Adelaide Hills, McLaren Vale and Padthaway, Victoria's Yarra Valley and the Hunter Valley of NSW have been the hot spots for chardonnay. But now Cowra has forced its way back into the spotlight with a notable double success by its Mulyan producer at the 2008 Sydney International Wine Competition.

The Sydney International event is the most relevant of all Australian wine awards because entries are judged alongside complementary food. Wine's role in enhancing the dining experience is really what wine competition should be all about, and this event scuttles those outrageous show pony wines contrived to make massive impact on judges' palates before spiralling into obscurity. And, of course, the food element stops the judges from falling about as they ponder the merits of 800 wines.

Cowra has always produced distinctive chardonnays and it was really only a matter of time before one emerged from the pack to gain prominence. Mulyan Wines has done that with a knockout performance that won it dual blue-gold medals at the 2008 event. (Blue-gold medals are awarded to the best of the entries with a conspicuous compatibility with food.)

The Cowra producer won the coveted awards with both its current release chardonnays — the 2006 Mulyan



Block 7 Cowra Chardonnay and the 2006 Mulyan Cowra Chardonnay. These two show stoppers retail for \$25 and \$20, about a third the price of a comparable French chardonnay. And while Cowra is now producing top mainstream and alternative variety reds, the Mulyan success underscores the fact that it is a world-class producer of chardonnays. In the UK market, Cowra chardonnay is regarded as a benchmark and commands the same status as Alsace riesling and New Zealand sauvignon blanc.

The Fagan family has a long association with the Cowra district, holding the beautiful Mulyan property since 1886. Peter Fagan says particular attention has been paid to vineyard practice in the past few years, and the results are beginning to show through. A 2006 Mulyan Cowra Viognier has also attracted show success and winemaker Drew Tuckwell has produced interesting blends of shiraz viognier and chardonnay viognier.

There are now around 40 wine producers in the Cowra district, and educated palates believe the Mulyan success is the beginning of a new Cowra Breakout. ✱

### **top tippie** 2006 Mulyan Block 7 Cowra Chardonnay, about \$25

A typical Cowra chardonnay in its generosity and ripeness. Great intensity and complexity already and more on the way if it's true to its rich, oaky style. There's a great bouquet of citrus blossom, ripe peaches and roasted cashews, plus impressive flavour, balance and texture that make this such a winner as a food wine. Make sure your next chardonnay is from Cowra and relive that old chardy excitement.