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## 8th CANBERRA INTERNATIONAL RIESLING CHALLENGE

HYATT HOTEL CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

16-20 OCTOBER 2007

19 Oct RESULTS & AWARDS DINNER

20 Oct PUBLIC TASTING

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# Medal of approval

Judges at the Canberra Regional Wine Show raised their glasses this month to toast some fresh takes on niche varieties, as

**Chris Shanahan** writes

**T**his month's Canberra Regional Wine Show offers a guide to dozens of delicious wines coming from the capital district and surrounding regions, including Tumbarumba, Gundagai, the Southern Highlands, the South Coast and Hilltops at Young.

You can troll through the catalogue of results at [www.rncas.org.au](http://www.rncas.org.au). But don't limit your shopping list to the gold medal and trophy winners because there is great drinking among the silver and bronze medallists, too.

This applies especially to some of the emerging or niche varieties. Semillon, for example, while unlikely to achieve much in Canberra, is the star variety at Coolangatta Estate, Nowra. These Tyrrell-made wines are unique and lovely. The standout in this year's show was their mature, but fresh, silver-medal winning 1998 vintage.

Closer to home at Gundaroo, pure, rich, apricot-like silver medallist Tallagandra Hill Viognier 2006 came within a sniff of gold and showed, yet again, how well suited Canberra is to this variety. Clonakilla blazed the way – Hardy's encouraged wider planting of it among independent growers and established a significant plot at Holt. We'll be hearing a lot more of viognier in Canberra, despite Hardy's exit from the region.

We judged several promising whites made from pinot gris but, to this judge, silver medallist Mount Majura Pinot Gris 2007 soared above the others. It's a particularly vibrant and pure white wine made by Frank van de Loo.

Bryan and Jocelyn Martin's Ravensworth Murrumbateman Sangiovese 2006, another silver medal winner, presents a bright, fresh, modern face of this classic Italian variety without losing the slightly rustic, savoury tannin structure. This is another significant, trail-blazing local wine.

In the past, Hardy's tended to dominate the sparkling wine class with its Tumbarumba-

based pinot noir chardonnay blends made by Ed Carr. However, Kosciusko Wines, of Tumbarumba, and Gallagher Wines, of Murrumbateman, plugged the gap created by their exit this year. Gallagher Blanc de Blanc 2005, made from Murrumbateman chardonnay, won silver. It's an appealing, well-made example of this lighter aperitif style. Gold medal winner Kosciusko Scius Pinot Noir Chardonnay 2005 showed the sheer class of fruit from cold Tumbarumba – and the extra dimension and structure added by pinot noir. This is another significant regional wine.

Ever-so-fashionable sauvignon blanc shows a glimmer of hope in two attractive and contrasting silver medallists: taut, pungent and pure McWilliam's Barwang Tumbarumba 2007, and funky, softer Brindabella Hills Canberra District 2007.

It would be fair to say that pinot noir remains a niche variety for the district, despite high ambitions for it from Lerida Estate at Lake George and Lark Hill, higher up on the Lake George escarpment.

Lark Hill no longer enters the show, which is a pity. And Lerida topped the pinot noir classes, winning a silver medal for its fragrant, silky-textured 2006. At the exhibitors' tasting proprietor Jim Lumbers said he was confident of an even better performance in future vintages.

In the national wine market, riesling, too, remains a niche – albeit much discussed – variety. But it's a star of the Canberra district and will be even better when our makers eliminate faults that blemish outstanding fruit.

Frost and drought slashed the 2007 riesling harvest, hence we had just 11 rieslings to judge, of which eight won medals: gold for Wallaroo, silver for Gallagher, Mount Majura and Helm Classic Dry and bronze for Pialligo Estate, Brindabella Hills and Four Winds. These are all lovely, fresh wines and strongly recommended. A riesling topped the white museum classes, too. Wallaroo 2002 (gold)

came in ahead Coolangatta Semillon 199 (silver) and Coolangatta Alexander Berry Chardonnay 2000 and Barwang Chardonnay 1996 on bronze.

Cabernet's 33 per cent medal strike rate was the lowest of the mainstream varieties that exhibited in significant numbers.

But there were several attractive silver medallists: Shaw Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 and Cabernet Shiraz 2004, Lambert 2004, McWilliams Barwang 2005 and Little Bridge 2005.

Fifteen of the 24 chardonnays exhibited earned medals. The only gold medallist, Bidgeebong Icon 2006, comes from Tumbarumba. And demonstrating chardonnay's versatility, the silver and bronze medallists came from Tumbarumba, Southern Highlands, South Coast, Hilltops, Lake George, Mount Majura and Murrumbateman.

Saving the best for last, shiraz, once again, was star of the show and certainly heads any shopping list for the region. We judged 45 shirazes and awarded seven gold medals, six silver medals and 16 bronze medals.

The winners came in a diversity of styles – within a generally refined, medium-bodied theme – from Murrumbateman, Lake George, Hilltops and Wamboin.

In the taste-off for the trophy, the beautifully fragrant, silky Lerida Estate Lake George Shiraz Viognier 2006 beat velvety, supple Chalkers Crossing Hilltops 2005 by two votes to one.

Other absolutely wonderful shirazes included gold medallists Nick O'Leary Canberra 2006, Lambert Canberra 2004, Lambert Reserve Canberra 2005 and Barwang Hilltops 2005; and silver medallists were Ravensworth Canberra 2006, Chalkers Crossing Hilltops 2004, Lerida Canberra 2005, Lambert Reserve Canberra 2004 and Barwang Hilltops 2004.