

ALONG THE CABERNET HIGHWAY

South Australia's Coonawarra is regarded as one of Australia's finest red wine regions. **Simon Calabria** looks at the best reds at a price to suit your budget.



UNDER \$20

Balnaves
'The Blend' 2008 (\$19)



\$20 to \$35

Majella Cabernet
Sauvignon 2008 (\$34)



\$35 to \$50

Zema Estate
Family Selection
Shiraz 2004 (\$46)



OVER \$50

Wynns John Riddoch
Cabernet Sauvignon
2006 (\$75)

Winegrowing regions offer a host of other reasons to visit, such as fine food, festivals and beautiful scenery. Part of the allure for me is the opportunity to drive between cellar doors on roads that gently twist and rise and turn and fall.

The proximity of cellar doors within the Coonawarra region offers a unique opportunity to visit many without much fuss. So much so that two mornings of tastings over a weekend enabled a visit to half the cellar doors, and the ability to taste just over 70 wines. It also presents the chance to gain a thorough understanding of the wines in terms of quality and vintage variation.

It should be no surprise that cabernet sauvignon reigns supreme in Coonawarra. As for vintages, notwithstanding South Australia was struck by heatwaves leading up to the 2008 vintage, across the board, wines from Coonawarra came through relatively unscathed. In fact, they seem to have benefited from lower yields and have resulted in some highly concentrated and balanced wines.

For a region with such a highly regarded reputation, you'd be forgiven for expecting prices to match. If anything, across all price points, the best wines still represented relative value.

For under \$20 a bottle, the **Balnaves 'The Blend' 2008** was fantastic, displaying the attraction and approachability of the partnership that cabernet and merlot can produce. At this price, don't dismiss white wines which also provide some good value. Highlights include Di Giorgio Lucindale Chardonnay 2002 (screw cap and cellar door only, which for its age was surprisingly fresh, balanced with mild cream and nutty notes) and the Hollick Savagnin 2009 (cellar door only).

Consumers are spoiled for choice in the \$20-\$35 bracket. I'd be more than happy drinking wines from Zema Estate (2006 Cabernet Sauvignon for \$26 and 2006 Shiraz for \$25), and Bowen Estate (2008 Cabernet Sauvignon and 2008 Shiraz, \$27). Also impressive was the Wynns 'The Gables' Cabernet Shiraz 2008 (\$25; cellar door only). However, it was the deeply seductive **Majella Cabernet Sauvignon 2008** that caught the

attention of my tastebuds—full of dark chocolate, mint, ripe, sweet fruit and silky tannins.

It's difficult to take a wrong turn between \$35-\$50, especially with wines like the Wynns Single Vineyard Alex 88 Cabernet Sauvignon 2008 (\$37); Hollick 'Wilgha' Wrattontully Shiraz 2006 (\$48); and Zema Estate's Family Selection Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 (\$46) and Shiraz 2005 (\$46).

But the **Zema Estate Family Selection Shiraz 2004** rose above the pack. Limited quantities are available, including ex-cellar door, and it was only that a bottle was accidentally opened that I was lucky enough to taste it (the 2005 is available for current tasting at cellar door). Fortunate indeed, as this wine impressed me when it was first released, and has improved since. Ah, the joys of visiting a cellar door.

With Coonawarra's supreme reputation, I expected more wines above \$50. For those that are, the quality and pedigree is unequivocal: Balnaves The Tally, Hollick Ravenswood, Katnook Odyssey, Majella The Mallea and Reschke Emphyrean.

It can be tough tasting wines at this level. Expectations are high, often the wines are only tasted soon after release, and then they sell out. This shouldn't be a problem with the **Wynns John Riddoch Cabernet Sauvignon 2006**. It has beautiful concentration, complexity, balance and length, with all the hallmarks of fine Coonawarra cabernet—cassis/blackberry, dark chocolate, cedar and mint. It will be more approachable in a year or two and will easily sleep in the cellar for many years to come. At this level the wines show Coonawarra is truly a world-class wine-producing region, particularly with the quality and value of cabernet.

Prices shown are RRP per bottle.

Simon operates Winecall, an internet/mail order-based wine business. For more information go to winecall.com.au