

Over the last twelve months, W&S tasting panels assessed more than 4,900 newly released imported wines. We profile the top performers from those tastings here as our 2003 *International Wineries of the Year*. These are the producers who earned the highest scores on individual wines, as well as the highest percentage of wines recommended to wines tasted. Some of the greatest producers in certain regions release only one or two bottlings a year, and so are not eligible for this list (we limited our selection to wineries with three or more recommendations). Look for these top performers in our list of the *100 Best Wines of the Year*.

Our tastings focus on regional character in the wines we assess, so our international list recognizes producers who consistently make great and expressive wines in their particular regions. W&S editors Joshua Greene, Ray Isle, Tara Q. Thomas, Patricio Tapia and Patrick J. Comiskey provide their perspectives on what makes each of these wineries great. Each profile includes a checklist of facts about the winery and list of the wines W&S recommended during the last year, noting the issue in which our review first appeared.

YALUMBA



Brian Walsh

Yalumba planted three acres of viognier in 1979 as an experiment, and now has four wines built from 70 acres of the vine. The mature plantings go into The Virgilius, while some of the viognier is fermented together with shiraz to massive effect. In the 2000 Barossa 90% Shiraz + 10% Viognier, the co-fermentation seems to enhance the extract, while the wine maintains enough freshness to keep all that ripe plum and black currant flavor in line. Viognier is a natural companion to the old-vine shiraz Barossa has made famous; exploring its potential. Yalumba's managing director Robert Hill Smith and winemaker Brian Walsh recently initiated an international viognier conference to promote

research and discussion of the variety.

While Yalumba can claim to have the oldest viognier vines in the Southern Hemisphere, it can also claim to be the oldest family-owned winery in Australia. Robert is a direct descendent of Samuel Hill Smith, the brewer from Britain who founded Yalumba in 1849. His family can also claim to run the only winery in the Southern Hemisphere to cooper all its barrels, their cooperage established 80 years ago. The firm imports French and American oak, then seasons it for five to eight years (significantly longer than most commercially made barrels). The cooperage provides the small, 90-liter octaves for aging The Octavius, Yalumba's top selection of old-vine shiraz.



The '99 Octavius is a Barossan beauty, a potent reservoir of floral, spicy fruit, all hidden for now within the smokiness of oak tannins.

Around the time they started planting viognier, the Hill Smith family established the Yalumba Nursery, which has grown into a successful business of its own. The winery is now self-sufficient when it comes to plant material, and the nursery gives them a means to introduce new material like the viognier and to propagate cuttings from old-vine stock. It's a valuable resource with 1,200 acres of vines to grow.

Half of those vines are at Oxford Landing, a 655-acre vineyard on the Murray River that's the namesake of Yalumba's value-priced wines like the '02 South Australia Oxford Landing Sauvignon Blanc...The vineyards also provide a base for the 'Y Series', just a small step up in price, offering fresh, clean values as well. Among the "Y"s, there's a bright 2002 Riesling with light peach and pear flavor; and smooth reds like the berried 2001 Shiraz.

Most of the top wines, however, grow in old-vine plantings the Hill Smiths have collected in Barossa

★	25 Wines Tasted 10 Recommended
92	'00 Hand Picked Barossa 90% Shiraz + Viognier 10%
91	'99 The Signature Barossa Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz
91	'99 The Octavius Barossa Old Vine Shiraz
90	'01 The Virgilius Eden Valley Viognier
89	'98 The Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz
85	'02 Yalumba 'Y Series' Riesling
82	'01 Yalumba 'Y Series' Shiraz
82	'01 Yalumba 'Y Series' Merlot
EV	'02 Oxford Landing Sauvignon Blanc
GV	'01 Oxford Landing Red

and Eden Valley. At the high-end of Yalumba's production, Brian Walsh has emphasized blends of cabernet sauvignon and shiraz from these old vines. The '99 Signature balances sweet shiraz flavors of plum with fresher black currant cabernet (51 percent). The '98 Reserve is plump and rich, less complex at the moment, but equally delicious. These deep reds need cellaring to bring the richness of Yalumba's old-vine fruit to the fore.

- Joshua Greene

Founded: 1849 **Winemaker:** Brian Walsh **Acres owned:** 1,200 **Annual production:** 90,000 cases **Estate grown:** 65% of premium wines
Owners: Robert and Sam Hill Smith **Known for:** Robust Barossa reds **Imported by:** Negociants U.S.A., Napa, CA