



We are one ... (from left) the Scarboroughs of Scarborough Wine: Ian, Jerome, Merralea and Sally with baby Jack. Photos: Quentin Jones, Paul Harris

## Variety on our doorstep

Sydneysiders can enjoy wine regions that are close-knit and close by, **Samantha Day** writes.

WHEN planning a getaway to a regional vineyard, options close to home are often forgotten.

The Southern Highlands is only a short drive south-west but it is a sanctuary where lovers of food and wine can leave urban worries behind.

Renowned for its pinot noir, the region began its growth period in the 1990s and today has more than 60 vineyards, many of which are expanding their range of varieties.

Tertini Wines viticulturist Paul Quirico is an enthusiastic resident. "There is so much to do in this region. In terms of wine, we've got some interesting things growing. Part of the experience here is trying our new, unusual varieties whilst enjoying old favourites like pinot and riesling."

Tertini Wines is a young vineyard; the first vines were planted in 2000. Yet in the winery's first three years, it won more than 80 medals. It has expanded its varieties to include arneis, an Italian variety and one Robert Kay of Tertini describes as unique.

"It's a temperamental, unpredictable and different variety of wine," he says. "There are only three wineries in Piedmonte, Italy, that still grow it. People tear their hair out over this wine – the name actually means 'little rascal' in dialect. For us, though, it has been well worth the effort."

If the chance to sample one of the world's

rarest wines is not incentive enough to visit, perhaps the relative youthfulness of the area is. For Kay, the area is reminiscent of McLaren Vale in the 1960s and '70s and is a region people can grow old with.

"The big producers won't come to the Southern Highlands," he says. "We'll always be a boutique wine region and that's a bonus for wine lovers and learners."

However, if you are interested in big wine

**'People walk away much more enlightened about what wine is really about.'** Sally Scarborough

producers, the Hunter Valley is the region you should visit. When thinking of wine regions, the Hunter is often one of the first that comes to mind. It is Australia's oldest growing-wine region – its vines were planted in the 1820s – and is home to some of the country's most distinguished wineries, including Scarborough, Tyrrell's, Wyndham Estate and Keith Tulloch.

Though the Hunter is famous for its great vineyards, Sally Scarborough of Scarborough Wine is certain there are also other reasons for people visiting in droves.

"There are plenty of things to do and see

in the Hunter," she says. "It could be a relaxing afternoon at a health retreat, a trip to an art gallery or a round of golf. The best part is you don't need loads of money to have a great weekend here, either."

Of the 100-plus wineries that dot the region, Scarborough is particularly special. The first vines of this family owned and operated vineyard were planted in 1987; it is one of the highest in altitude in the region as well as one of the few on red, volcanic soil. It is this rare soil that stimulates the flavours in the company's flagship chardonnay.

For novice wine-tasters, Scarborough has a few tips. "I would recommend no more than four tastings in one day," she says. "At many of the tastings, you are sampling eight to 10 wines, so the consumption of alcohol is high." To break things up, she suggests a hearty lunch at one of the region's fine restaurants, such as The Wine House and Kitchen or Amanda's On The Edge.

"Some people find coming to the Hunter confrontational because they feel they know nothing about wine," she says.

"At Scarborough, we sit visitors down and give them information about different varieties so they can make up their own mind. That's the beauty of this region – people come in and walk away much more enlightened about what wine is really about. It's a very inclusive experience."