

Life & Leisure

Life & Luxury Food & Wine

How could these different chardonnays all come from the same vineyard?

Three winemakers have chosen to focus on making single-site expressions of this favourite. Go on, just taste their variety.



This bottle of chardonnay from Scarborough Wines Co is one of three from the Keepers of the Flame series: three bottles made from small single-site parcels of grapes across three vintages.

Max Allen
Drinks columnist

The idea that the same grape variety grown in different regions produces wines with different flavours and characters is widely understood and accepted. We don't expect a chardonnay from the hot Hunter Valley to taste the same as a chardonnay from the cool Mornington Peninsula, 1000 kilometres to the south.

Wine geeks revel, too, in the taste of terroir at a subregional level: the way that chardonnay from a vineyard on the warmer sandy flatlands is distinct from chardonnay grown on the cooler red-soil hillsides up the road.



One of the vineyards at Hoddles Creek in the Yarra Valley.

But sometimes you don't have to look as far as other regions or even other vineyards in the same region to find distinctive flavours and characters. Wines from some parts of the *same* vineyard can often taste markedly different from wines from other parts.

Whether it's the soil in the northern corner being deeper and richer than the soil in the southern corner; the slight rise at the top of the block that exposes the grapes to a touch more afternoon sun; the proximity of the vines at the edge of the vineyard to trees or

water; each of these differences in the physical properties of the site can make a subtle but tasteable difference to the wines made from those grapes.



A new trio of single-site chardonnays, called Keepers of the Flame, has been released by Scarborough Wine Co in the Hunter Valley, NSW.

Here are three producers applying this vineyard-specific focus to chardonnay with outstanding results.

Chardonnay in focus

Scarborough Wine Co, Hunter Valley

I spent a lot of time in the Hunter Valley back in the 1990s and early 2000s when my in-laws had a vineyard there, and one of the regular fixtures on the dining table was a bottle of chardonnay from Scarborough – or “Scarby chardy” as we called it. We weren’t

alone in our affection: it was chardonnay that built the reputation for the winery that Ian and Merralea Scarborough established in the mid-'80s.



The vineyards at Scarborough Wine Co in the Hunter Valley, NSW.

Now, Ian and Merralea's children, Jerome and Sally, and Jerome's wife, award-winning viticulturist Liz Riley, are honouring that legacy with a range of wines called Keepers of the Flame. The first three releases are, appropriately, chardonnays, made from small, single-site parcels of grapes across three vintages.

The 2019 is from the Ogilvie's View vineyard in the Upper Hunter, from a patch of mixed clones of chardonnay, a little more elevated than the rest of the vineyard, planted in red-brown clay-loam. It's the richest wine of the three, a beautiful glowing lemon yellow

in the glass, with complex flavours of lanolin, honey and vanilla, textural and pulpy and creamy on the tongue.



Winemaker siblings Jerome and Sally Scarborough, and Jerome's wife, viticulturist Liz Riley,

The 2020 and 2021 are both from a particular parcel of the Cottage vineyard, a sandier site in the Lower Hunter, planted with a newer French clone of chardonnay. The 2020 – from an unforgettably difficult bushfire-ravaged vintage – is pristine, focused, fresh, bright and tangy, while the 2021 is more savoury, mineral and lean, showing plenty of potential to blossom further in the bottle.

The wines sell for \$100 each or \$250 for a three pack. scarboroughwine.com.au

Hoddles Creek Estate, Yarra Valley

Hoddles Creek Estate's "basic" white-label chardonnay has long been regarded as one of the great white wine bargains: it is remarkable that the D'Anna family can produce a wine of such reliable quality and precision, year after year, in the often challenging climatic conditions of the cool, damp Upper Yarra, and sell it for just \$25 a bottle.



Franco D'Anna at Hoddles Creek Estate in the Yarra Valley. **Stefano D'Anna**

Over the past decade or so, the D'Annas have also sharpened their focus on individual blocks within their estate vineyard holdings, to produce single-site expressions in more limited quantity and at appropriately higher prices.

The first range of these more detailed wines was flamboyantly labelled “1er Yarra Valley”. The 2021 chardonnay, from a higher block than most of the chardonnay plantings on the estate, easterly facing on leaner soils and featuring Burgundian clones, is the latest vintage release, and it’s gorgeous: toasty, complex, ripe yellow fruit, layered, textural, really satisfying in the mouth.



Franco D’Anna tipping in grapes for the next batch of chardonnay. **Stefano D’Anna**

The 2020 Syberia chardonnay comes from a discrete block of chardonnay vines established 15 years ago using cuttings taken from the existing vineyard, and planted – unlike the original sites – in east-west rows. Picked at slightly lower sugar levels than the

other blocks and given a little more time in bottle before release, it's a scintillating, distinctive wine, with glistening, crystalline lemon purity and thrilling energy on the tongue.

Each wine costs \$65 a bottle. hoddlescreekestate.com.au

Kooyong, Mornington Peninsula

The practice of bottling small batches of wine from individual parcels within the 40-hectare Kooyong vineyard at Tuerong on the Mornington Peninsula started nearly two decades ago and is being continued with impressive style by winemaker Glen Hayley.



Chief winemaker Glen Hayley from Kooyong and Port Phillip Estate wines. **Wine Australia**

Hayley makes several wines under the Kooyong and Port Phillip Estate labels (both are owned by the Gjergja family) that show excellent sub-regional terroir definition: the Red Hill chardonnay, for example, from vines planted in a higher-altitude site, is markedly different to the Balnarring chardonnay, grown 10 kilometres down the hill.

The Farrago and Faultline chardonnays, by contrast, come from blocks planted just a few dozen metres apart at Kooyong in the late 1990s, and although they're made in near-identical ways – whole-bunch pressed, wild fermented, aged on lees in barrel (20 per cent new) for 11 months, bottled unfined and unfiltered – they are also distinctly different.



A selection of wines from Kooyong, which specialises in chardonnay and pinot noir.

The 2020 Farrago Chardonnay, planted in shallower clay soils with more ironstone pebbles, is driven by pure glossy fruit, bright and shiny, lovely and pulpy and long. The 2020 Faultline, grown in less stony, deeper clay soil, is more layered, more complex, with similar pure pulpy fruit flavours to the Farrago, but also a mineral core of citrus-drizzled stone and juicy vitality.

Each wine costs \$60 a bottle. portphillipestate.com.au



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