



Wines of the Canberra District  
Undiscovered Treasures

# Foreword

The readers of this book could not have chosen a better time to find the “Undiscovered Treasures” of Canberra District wines. The District is producing many exceptional quality wines, as is evidenced in Chapter 6 of this book.

Huon Hooke, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald Good Living Supplement<sup>1</sup> stated :

“Today the Canberra District is flourishing, and produces some of the finest and most exciting cool climate wines in the land, thanks to its high altitude and continental inland climate. All the vineyards are sited between 500m and 800m. That’s quite a range of altitudes, but even 500m is high for vines. It’s the range of altitudes and mesoclimates that makes Canberra wine so diverse and interesting.”

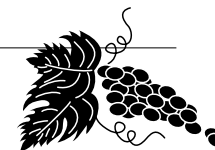
This book is a testament to the pioneers, the current grapegrowers and winemakers who are combining to produce truly outstanding grapes and wines. The grapes from the 2001 and 2002 vintages were of very high quality, with intense flavours, excellent acid/sugar balance and ripe tannins. Some of these wines are now making their way onto the market, providing wines of exceptional flavour and intensity. Now is the time to taste them, so I would encourage those who haven’t toured the District to come and discover them for themselves.

Brian Johnston  
Canberra  
November 2002



# Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	ii
<b>FOREWORD</b> .....	iii
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
Introduction .....	1
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
Wine Production in the 1840s .....	2
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
The Rebirth of Canberra District in the 1970s .....	4
— Profiles of Dr Riek, Dr Kirk and Mr Ken Helm .....	8
— National Riesling Challenge .....	16
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
BRL Hardy Entry into the Canberra District .....	17
— Brief Profiles of the Tumbarumba and Hilltops Regions .....	20
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
The Region's Climate, Soil and Grape Potential .....	22
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
Award Winning Wines .....	31
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
Touring the District — Finding the Wineries, Food and Accommodation .....	38
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	
Winery Profiles .....	42
<b>FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES</b> .....	110



# The Rebirth of Canberra District in the 1970s

**T**he first known vineyard within the Australian Capital Territory was established at Narrabundah in the late 1920's, when an Italian family planted grapes in land allocated by the Territory for the development of orchards. From discussions held with a family descendent, Mr Bin Forner, it has been found that his uncle (Mr Clem Forner) arrived in Australia on 23 October 1924 on the same boat as Mr De Bortoli, who subsequently went on to establish a wine empire at Griffith, NSW.

Clem moved from Griffith to Canberra to work in the newly established ACT in 1925. When orchard leases became available at Narrabundah, he planted 3 acres (1.2ha) of red and white grapes, described by Bin Forner as making 'Chablis' and 'Cabernet' style wines. The two families (Clem and his brother Martin) successfully made wine from these grapes for consumption by family and friends right through to when the ACT Government began shortening the leases in the late 1950s.

As Canberra became further established as the nation's capital in the 1960s, the influx of politicians, bureaucrats, builders and businessmen created a demand for wine, which stirred a commercial interest in growing grapes for local wine production.<sup>7</sup>

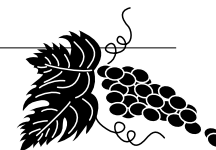
The rebirth of the Canberra wine region as a commercial operation occurred when a few pioneers began to plant grapes in small acreages. Notable among these were two CSIRO scientists Dr Edgar Riek and Dr John Kirk — colloquially known as the two Doctors. Profiles on these two pioneers are provided later in this chapter.

Helm and Cambourne<sup>7</sup> also reported that Max Blake, a Research Officer at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, established a trial plot of about 100 vines on his property near Bungendore in 1968. That site was also abandoned several years later and in 1973 he planted 10 acres (4ha) of grapes at Shingle House (Brooks Creek) on the Bungendore Road.

In 1970, Noel McAuliffe planted a small vineyard on the 'Treeless Plain' near Yass, comprising 300 vines of semillon, riesling, cabernet sauvignon, and shiraz. This small vineyard also grew very good grapes and is reported to have produced a small quantity of wine, but did not go into commercial production.



One of the early Canberra District Vineyards



# Award Winning Wines

**C**anberra District wines have an enviable reputation for quality, as attested to by the many wine show awards being won by the District's winemakers. Also, the wines are increasingly being recognised by wine writers and critics as amongst the finest in Australia. For the general public, there truly are some "Undiscovered Treasures" amongst them, hence the title of this book.

In order to provide the reader with some insights into the quality of wines and the wine types that are performing well at regional and national wine shows, tables were collated of gold and trophy winning wines from Canberra District over the decade 1992 -2001. These are the highest level of awards at regional or national wine shows and the data was collated from winemakers' records.

To win awards at this level indicates a very fine quality wine indeed. A gold medal in a wine show usually requires scoring 18.5 points and above, out of a potential 20, a very demanding requirement. To win a trophy, the wine needs to win a gold or silver medal and to be the best wine in its class or of the show. The analysis shown below has collated gold medals won at the Royal Agricultural Society shows, and competitions such as the

Australian Small Winemakers, the Boutique Wine Awards and the Winewise Small Vignerons Awards.



Photo courtesy of Madew Wines



# Touring the District

## — finding the wineries, food and accommodation

This chapter provides some guidance on finding the wineries of the Canberra District, where the district villages are located and some of the places where you might like to eat and stay. The focus is on the local wine district, rather than Canberra city itself. Extensive information on Canberra is available through the Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation (CTEC) website: [www.canberratourism.com.au](http://www.canberratourism.com.au), as well as at the Visitors Centre on Northbourne Avenue.

For convenience, Winery Profiles are listed alphabetically in Chapter 8. The start of that Chapter includes a Map of the District and a Map Reference number for each winery. The tour descriptions below only include those wineries offering cellar door tasting. A number of Canberra District wineries are not open to the public at all times and particular care needs to be taken as to which ones you will be able to visit at various times and days of the week. Some of the wines profiled in this book are only available through mail order. Please check with the wineries directly, if you have doubts.

The Canberra District wine region currently includes two wineries relatively near to the city — the Kamberra Winery and Tourism Complex in north Canberra (Map Reference 13) and

Pialligo Estate (Map Reference 26), which is located near Canberra Airport.

To locate Kamberra, head north along Northbourne Avenue. You will soon reach the Kamberra winery opposite the Canberra racecourse. The winery offers wine tasting and also light refreshments at the Meeting Place Restaurant.



# Brindabella Hills Winery

**Owners:** Roger and Faye Harris

**Location:** Map Reference 2

**Address**

156 Woodgrove Close  
via Hall ACT 2618

**Contacts**

Phone: 02 6230 2583

Fax: 02 6230 2023

Email: [brindabellahills@bigpond.com](mailto:brindabellahills@bigpond.com)

**The Wines**

Brindabella Hills makes Riesling, Chardonnay, Semillon-Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon.

**Cellar Door Sales**

10am-5pm weekends and public holidays. Tasting room and picnic facilities are available.

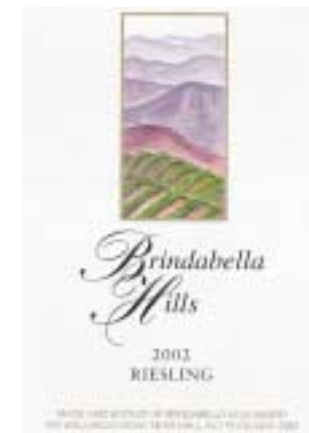
Brindabella Hills wines are to be found in most bottle shops and many restaurants in Canberra. Local distribution is by National Capital Fine Wines on 02 6239 5888.

Brindabella Hills was the first vineyard and winery in the picturesque hills west of Hall, established in 1986 by Roger and Faye Harris. This area now has seven vineyards with nearly 100 acres (42ha) under vine and will soon qualify for sub-region wine status.

The vineyard comprises 3 hectares of vines planted to the white grape varieties of riesling, chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and semillon, and red grape varieties of cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and shiraz. The vineyard is sited on a granite ridge that rises above the Murrumbidgee River and maximizes the climatic advantages of a warm site in a cool district. It is admirably suited to the grape varieties grown.

Roger is qualified in both chemistry (Ph.D Adelaide) and in winemaking (Charles Sturt University), having had a successful earlier career in CSIRO.

Since 1999 Brindabella Hills has expanded, doubling production for its own label and taking on contract winemaking for other growers in the area. The winery, too, has doubled in size and handled a 100 tonne crush in 2002.



# Madew Wines

**Owners:** David and Romilly Madew

**Location:** Map Reference 20

**Address**

"Westering" The Vineyards  
Lake George NSW 2581

**Contacts**

Phone: 02 4848 0026, Mob: 0411 383 677

Fax: 02 4848 0026

Email: david.madew@madewwines.com.au

Web: www.madewwines.com.au

**The Wines**

Wines available are Riesling, Belle Riesling, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Belle Pinot Gris and Merlot. A Shiraz will shortly be available. The wines use a Stelvin cap on delicate wines, to avoid any possibility of cork taint.

**Cellar Door Sales**

11am–5pm, Wed to Sun — other times by appointment.

Madew Wines is located on the Federal Highway on the edge of Lake George, backing onto the beautiful Cullerin Escarpment, about 30 minutes north of Canberra.

It is a pretty site and one of the oldest vineyards in the Canberra District, planted in 1973 as "Westering" by Mr Geoff Hood. It was acquired by David and Romilly in the winter of 1994, and their first vintage at the site was in 1995. Their move to the Westering site was prompted by a need to expand from the original family vineyard site at 'Appletree Hill' in Queanbeyan. That vineyard was developed in 1980 by Dr Madew, David's father.

The 9 hectare Westering vineyard is located at 690m above sea level. The site includes the winery and "grapefoodwine" restaurant catered for by the Hyatt Hotel of Canberra. David is a true wine enthusiast and the focus of the winery is premium cool climate wines made to a quality standard and style " We make wines that we like".





### **About the Author**

Dr Brian Johnston has a passion for producing fine wines. He holds a PhD in economics from the Australian National University and has held senior positions in the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and in the Office of the Commonwealth Minister. His work has involved building the export competitiveness of Australian rural industries, of which wine is a fine example. More recently he has developed the wine label McKellar Ridge, with his wife Janet, to produce premium quality wines from the Canberra District.