

The same difference

Production techniques can be extremely varied, even between neighbouring wineries.



Variety ... (clockwise) Tom Carson of Yabby Lake Vineyard; 'The Moorooduc' Chardonnay; Shaw + Smith M3 Chardonnay; Yabby Lake Chardonnay.

– indeed, the same locality, the Moorooduc Plains.

The 2008 Yabby Lake Chardonnay (\$43) is light-yellow in colour and has a fresh, youthful, fruit-driven aroma. It is tight and lively, leanish and delicate in the mouth, with room to grow and the potential to improve and build complexity over two or three years. It should live for at least eight years if well cellared. "We want to make a complex but fine, long chardonnay," Carson says.

Next to it, we tasted the 2006 Moorooduc Estate "The Moorooduc" Chardonnay (\$58). Not a

fair comparison, strictly speaking, as it's two years older. But it doesn't really matter: the difference would still be stark if it were younger. The colour was medium-full yellow; the bouquet rich and multifaceted. It was hard to describe as it was so complex, but honey, roasted hazelnuts, malty lees and vanilla were in there, along with many other things. A big wine, tremendously rich and lingering, with a marvellously satisfying, almost chewy texture.

Hill Smith's Shaw + Smith 2006 M3 Chardonnay (\$42), from a cool year and with no acid addition, had 50 per cent malolactic and tasted

appropriately tight and fine. It was much more fruit-driven than a Burgundy tasted beside it – 2006 Louis Jadot Meursault Charmes (\$157). It was cleaner, fresher and more youthful, yet didn't lack complexity – an outstanding wine.

One of the most talked-about winemaking variables with chardonnay is the choice of wild yeast versus inoculation with cultured yeast. More and more Australians are opting for the former in search of greater complexity and texture. "Wild ferments are particularly good for chardonnay," Carson says.

At Moorooduc Estate, where Rick is a legendary bread baker and yeast nut, "wild yeast" is a winery slogan as well as a way of life. Indeed, the entire process is hands-off to a large extent.

"We want lots of solids in the juice so the yeast has something to eat," Kate says.

"We certainly don't filter or fine the juice. Wild-yeast fermentation [in barrels] of high-solids juice gives us nice savoury characters."

Cheers to that. If you want a voluptuous, Burgundy-style chardonnay of great character and generosity, where nature has been given free rein to express herself, the Moorooduc has my vote. But, as ever, vive la difference.



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winemaker's choice of techniques and treatments has a marked effect on the kind of wine produced. And the range of winemaking techniques is large.

Take malolactic fermentation, a secondary fermentation that converts harsh acids to softer ones.

Carson deliberately inhibits the malolactic to retain as much natural grape acid as possible and preserve freshness. Michael Hill Smith, of Shaw + Smith, says the vogue in Australia is for zero malolactic, not only to protect natural acidity but to keep the wine tight and fine and able to age.

But at Moorooduc Estate, the McIntyre family embraces the malolactic. "Our wines want to have a malolactic and it doesn't unbalance the wine," says Kate

McIntyre, the marketing manager and daughter of winemaker Rick McIntyre. The McIntyres take the attitude that in Burgundy, chardonnay's home, all great chardonnay has been through a malolactic, therefore it is part of the wine's character.

Shaw + Smith has a foot in both camps. It puts some wine through malolactic, depending on the season – in a hot, low-acid vintage it will do less; in a cold season, more.

As you might expect, Moorooduc's wines are quite different from Yabby Lake's, even though they are in the same region – the Mornington Peninsula



It was Remington Norman's book, *The Great Domains of Burgundy*, that showed me how great wine can be made by people using diametrically opposed methods in the same village. Norman's detailed explanation of winemaking techniques revealed that while one producer would tell you the only way to make gevey chambertin is like this, you could walk around the corner to another domaine and be told a completely different story. Both would insist theirs was the only way and both could be making great wine.

This came back to me at a seminar, run by the distributor Mezzanine and Red + White, where five producers poured their wines – chardonnays then pinot noirs – and detailed how each was made. Chardonnay is an especially fun topic on which to hold a post-mortem exam in this way. As winemaker Tom Carson, of Yabby Lake, said: "There's no white wine that relies more on process than chardonnay." He meant the



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