

# mwr

## TASTE **THE** WORLD

MELBOURNE WINE ROOM 125 FITZROY STREET ST KILDA VIC 3182 PH: 03 9525 5599

Marcus Ellis is the Wine Buyer at the Melbourne Wine Room, an award-winning bar that has over 700 wines on its wine list and over 25 wines by the glass. Although renowned for its unique array of European wines, Ellis is keen to support the best of the Australian producers at the lower end of the price scale. It's a winning formula – this St Kilda institution came second in the Wine Bar of the Year category of the *Australian Bartender Magazine Awards* 2004, was awarded three Glasses at the Wine List of the Year Awards 2004 and the restaurant was awarded one Hat by *The Age's* Good Food Awards in 2005. It's fair to say, then, that Marcus Ellis knows a thing or two about his wines. MIRANDA KERNAVAN

“THE PRINCIPAL basis on which we choose a wine for the wine list is quality,” says Ellis. “In particular, I really want the bottom end of the list to provide good value and be the best in their category.”

Ellis picks wines that are regarded as classics, as well as wines which he considers are being made by the producers of the future. Two that he has his eye on are Curly Flat and Golden Ball wines, both produced locally in Victoria. “These wines are really showing a lot of progress, they’re constantly evolving,” he says.

When Ellis looks overseas, he also puts in the research so that the Wine Room has a point of difference.

“We’re quite committed to selecting unusual wines or wines that are new to the market. I’m a big fan of the Austrian variety, Grüner Veltliner. I’m also very keen on indigenous Italian varieties. Generally, we’re committed to having a broad range

its benchmark from Europe, so I think it’s very important to see how the Australian and European wines compare, both in quality and style. You have to stay open-minded, both as a consumer and a buyer.”

According to Ellis, Italian wine is a good example of how people can have closed perceptions, as it is greatly underestimated by the majority of Australians.

“There are some 45,000-plus wine producers in Italy, compared to about 2000-odd in Australia. I really think that, to look at the poor Italian wines of 10 years ago and judge the whole of Italian wine today by that standard would be a bit of a mistake. Yes, a lot of Italian producers do still make simple,

may be difficult to find here in Australia. Slightly further afield, he also recommends wines from the Wachau region in Austria.

For all the filling in the gaps on the world map, Ellis says that still the main thing to take into account, whether you’re considering starting a wine cellar or even if you already have one established, is to buy wines that you actually like.

“You need to work out what does and doesn’t work for you,” he says. “It’s all a matter of personal preference. You also need to observe how your taste changes over time.”

Two Australian wineries that he suggests looking out for are Teusner wines – “they’re making

the swank main bar area to a busy, cement-floored room with exposed pipes and other odds and ends competing for space. The temperature controlled to around 18°C, which Ellis says is slightly higher than classic cellaring temperatures. According to Ellis, many European cellars are kept at 14–16°C, but such temperatures are considered a bit too low by the Australian palate. “It’s not harmful at all for wine to be stored in temperatures a couple of degrees higher,” he says, “and you need to be accommodating to your market,” says Ellis. And taste – like the world of wine itself – is always changing and developing.



of wines from around the world, but we choose trophy wines and collectables too.”

So what does Ellis think about choosing European wines over Australian wines?

“It’s essential to have both European and Australian wines on the list,” he says. “It’s dangerous to become too parochial. There are great wines made all around the world. A lot of what we do with wine in Australia still takes

rough wines, but there has been a huge push to producing high quality wines as well. It’s really a matter of exposure to the great number of really higher-quality Italian wines out there.”

Ellis suggests keeping an eye out for Italian wines from Maremma in the Tuscan coastal region, which he describes as “a really burgeoning area”. Sicily is another region Ellis thinks is on the way up, although wines from here

small amounts of handcrafted Grenache and Shiraz wines in the Barossa” – as well as Heathcote wines. Perhaps one of the Australian wines of the moment, however, is Golden Ball Beechworth Shiraz.

Despite the volume and huge value of the wines at the Melbourne Wine Room, the cellar itself is extremely unpretentious, a climb down a narrow hole in the floor behind

#### **Raveneau Chablis Premier Cru Montée de Tonnerre**

(2002) Raveneau is often said to be “the king of Chablis”. Best through to 2010. Around \$120

#### **Weltkulturerbe Wachau Grüner Veltliner Federspiel Bauerl**

(2002) An Austrian wine said to be perhaps the single most versatile food wine in the world because of its ability to pair with “difficult” foods. About \$20.

#### **Masseto Tenuta dell’ Ornellaia**

(1999) A Tuscan Cabernet/Merlot blend with silky fullness and aromatic warmth. Check auctions – over \$200.

#### **Golden Ball Beechworth Shiraz**

(2002) A great cool climate Shiraz from Victoria with a lively touch. \$39.90

#### **2001 Curly Flat Pinot Noir**

A taut, ripe, fresh and juicy wine from the Macedon Ranges in Victoria. \$54.95