

Coonawarra & Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon

Australia's prime Cabernet regions are vastly different in size, soil and climate. So too are the resulting wine styles, which cater for all tastes, says Sarah Ahmed

COONAWARRA AND MARGARET River are Australia's leading Cabernet Sauvignon regions, but which rules the roost? A run of impressive vintages since 2007 consolidated Margaret River's reputation for consistency but Coonawarra has upped its game since a fresh influx of labour enabled this remote South Australian region to restructure vineyards and undertake more operations by hand. Fruit quality has never been better, intensifying the rivalry.

Though Cabernet was planted when the region was founded by John Riddoch in 1890, Coonawarra didn't find its feet for 60 years. Some 400km south of Adelaide, its remoteness affected labour and sales. The tide turned in 1946 when the original Riddoch cellars were bought first by Woodleys, then Samuel Wynn & Co. Now known as Wynns, this estate owns 70% of all vineyards planted on Coonawarra's well-drained, terra rossa soils (clay/loam over limestone) – the intensely planted strip of terra rossa is only 12km long and 2km wide. By the 1960s the mint-choc style of Coonawarra Cabernet was famous.

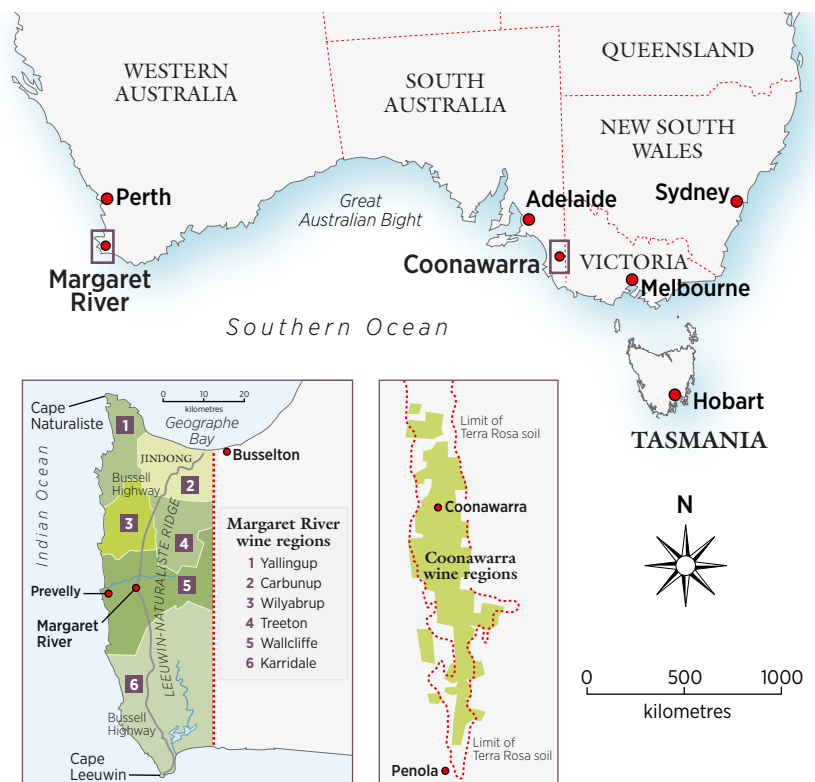
Margaret River's focus on Cabernet was influenced by agronomist Dr John Gladstones' 1965 and 1966 reports. Due to its maritime climate and well-drained ironstone gravel soils, he compared the Western Australian region to Bordeaux's Right Bank in a good vintage (given Margaret River's drier conditions). Regional pioneers (Cullen, Vasse Felix, Cape Mentelle and Moss Wood) never looked back and their authoritative wines have stood the test of time.

Climate and style

Margaret River's mild maritime conditions are key to its consistency. Ocean breezes mean that, unlike in Coonawarra (100km inland), there's little risk of frost, while extended Indian summers increase ripening potential. This accounts for an elegant balance, even when young – wines have a sweet core of fruit, acidity is fresh but integrated and, depending on location, tannins range from silky to sinewy. North around Yallingup produces robust, structured reds. Central and warmer, Wilyabrup is renowned for generous, powerful wines of Pauillac-like stature and richness. Wines from the cooler south (between Margaret River and Karridale) are sinewy, with bramble and herbaceous notes. Top wines from these coastal areas on the ridge develop a wonderful, gravelly minerality and can last 20 to 30 years.

Coonawarra is cooler than Margaret River. Greater continentality results in diurnal temperature extremes, producing dense, dark-fruited wines with assertive, ripe tannin and acidity. Slight variations of soil type, depth and climate yield stylistic differences. The region's classic minty quality is attributed to the more elevated, sandier sites on the east, while wines from the cooler microclimate to the south have a red fruit bias. Top wines, which can age 30 years plus, readily mop up new oak. Sometimes austere in their youth, over time tannins mellow, and mint, chocolate, black olive, leather and earth notes develop.

Known as The Wine Detective (www.thewinedetective.co.uk), Sarah Ahmed is a wine writer and educator.



Coonawarra & Margaret River Cabs: know your vintages

2011 Coonawarra: Wet weather, mixed results; forward wines, lower alcohols. **Margaret River:** Hot summer, mild autumn; rich, ripe wines of stature.

2010 c: Ideal growing conditions; rich, ripe, powerful wines for the long haul. **MR:** Warm, dry year; structured, ageworthy wines with generous fruit.

2009 c: Classic vintage; deeply coloured, well-defined, ageworthy wines. **MR:** Temperate, dry vintage; exceptionally harmonious, pure wines.

2008 c: Dry conditions and a March heatwave; generous, dense wines with ripe tannins. **MR:** Elegant, perfumed wines with well delineated fruit. Classic.

2007 c: Frost then drought slashed yields; concentrated, solid wines with spicy tannins. **MR:** Warm, early vintage; generously fruity but balanced wines.

2006 c: Warm year with well-timed rains; elegant, well balanced wines. **MR:** Unusually cool, rainy year; forward, lighter than usual, herbaceous wines.

Coonawarra & Margaret River: the facts

Area (2010)
Coonawarra 12km by 1.8km;
6,110ha is under vine
Margaret River 100km by
27km; 5,189ha under vine

Producers
C30 MR 155;
Cabernet Sauvignon
plantings
Australia 28,608ha (2001)

falling to 26,400ha (2010)
C 2,031ha (2003) rising to
3,444ha (2010)
MR 1,132ha (2001) rising to
1,291ha (2010)

The results

An impressive tasting to say the least, with our judges seduced by Western elegance, particularly in the younger wines, as well as by savoury, mature Cabernets from South Australia. Tina Gellie reports

A 100% HIT rate of Recommended wines is rare in *Decanter* panel tastings, but this one was fully deserved, according to our jubilant panelists who said readers could ‘buy with confidence’ from these pages.

While the tasting was quite evenly divided between Margaret River (47 wines) and Coonawarra (38), it was the former that came in for the highest praise. ‘Margaret River – fantastic!’ said Roger Jones. ‘The wines are a pleasure to drink. They’ve got everything a claret lover would want at a fraction of the cost of Bordeaux: silky texture, bright fruit, balanced oak...’ Anthony Rose noted the high-quality fruit of the Western Australian wines: ‘Very subtle with European fruit characters, well-handled oak and restrained alcohol levels.’ Pierre Mansour agreed: ‘Coonawarra was certainly singing, but Margaret River stole the show.’

Where the Coonawarra wines did outshine their Western counterparts, however, was in the older wines. ‘Whether that is because the younger Coonawarra wines need time to improve is something to be reassessed when we revisit them in a few years,’ said Mansour. Jones observed that 2010 and 2009 Bordeaux (see p83) would also be difficult to taste, however that didn’t seem to

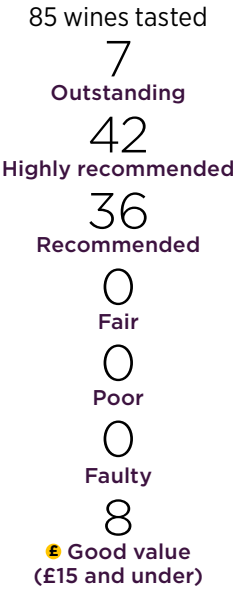
‘*There’s nowhere else in the world that does Cabernet like this – except Bordeaux*’

Roger Jones

matter for the Margaret River wines of the same vintages. ‘But the Coonawarras from 2008s and older were world-class – amazing wines you could drink now and that will age gracefully for years.’

Rose said it was a ‘paradox’ that the younger Margaret River wines ‘showed terrifically’ and the Coonawarra ones not so well, and that the converse was true with more mature vintages (though there were no Margaret River wines older than 2007). Jones said it was significant: ‘Consumers should buy aged Coonawarra Cabs – they are great value compared with Margaret River and will offer a fantastically different, more bricky, bloody taste profile.’ Rose added that all the wines – even older vintages – would benefit from ageing and that ‘while the primary fruit is lovely, people should give them the chance to mature

The scores



The tasters’ verdicts

Roger Jones



Jones is vice-chairman & fellow of The Master Chefs of Great Britain, owns Michelin-starred restaurant The Harrow at Little Bedwyn, and frequently visits Australia to add to the more than 350 Australian wines on his 1,000-bin list.

Jones’ verdict
‘This was a very pleasurable tasting with a very high standard. The wines from Margaret River were consistent throughout, while in Coonawarra it was

only with older vintages that the real quality shone through. In general, these wines would have a very large drinking window, with many approachable from 2015 and continuing for up to 20 years, evolving all the time.

‘The overall winemaking was terrific, showing a great balance between barrel and grapes – the expressive nature and complexity of the Margaret River wines in particular was very evident throughout. They were a real pleasure to drink. They’ve got everything a claret lover would want at a fraction of the cost of Bordeaux. The wines from Coonawarra seemed more textured and herbaceous with darker berries and more bloodiness to the wines.

‘Overall, these are absolutely world-class wines made by some of the world’s best winemakers.’

Pierre Mansour



Mansour joined UK wine club The Wine Society in 2000 following stints with London merchants Berry Bros & Rudd and the Antique Wine Company. He is responsible for the Society’s Australian list.

Mansour’s verdict
“‘Wow” may not be the most appropriate technical tasting term, but it was a word that came up a number of times in my notes: this was an exceptional line-up of wines. It was the level of consistency that

really stood out, demonstrating the sheer quality and class of Australian Cabernet Sauvignon. Furthermore, these were not bland wines – they showed individuality and personality, with the very best offering a complexity of flavour that constantly changed in the glass.

‘Margaret River stole the show, where I scored seven wines above 18.5pts/20 (95pts/100) – the highest number I have ever scored. They were beautifully restrained in style, both understated yet intense, and to me were the most complete wines of the tasting. The winemaking talent was clear to see in the discreet use of oak and ripe quality of the tannins.

‘Coonawarra was a bit patchier. The younger vintages, 2010 and 2009, were demanding to taste, where I felt additions of tangy acid resulted in a certain awkwardness to the overall feel and structure of the wines. Perhaps evolution in bottle will bring these round; time will tell. Certainly the last flight of wines, a selection of older vintages, would suggest that bottle age brings about marvellous changes for Coonawarra Cabernet. There were some real stunners here, in particular 2006, 2005 and 2004, which will bring a lot of drinking pleasure.’

and develop complex secondary characters’.

Mansour noted that while there was ‘a very impressive level of consistency’ between both regions, vintage variation was evident. ‘The 2010s from Margaret River were excellent. There was a completeness; a sense the wines are now being made from more established vines: lots of tannin but lots of fruit to balance, sensitive oak and integrated acidity – which is important because it is such a structured, muscular wine as a single varietal. For the 2010s from Coonawarra I was writing “mouthwatering, tangy”, which suggests to me the acidity was not entirely natural and that accentuated the edginess of the tannins.’

He said the ‘09s from Margaret River looked ‘surprisingly evolved’ but tasted ‘delicious, with a ripe mid-palate fruit’. 2009 in Coonawarra was a ‘difficult’ flight: ‘They were awkward and tannic.’ It was the 2008s from both the West and South of Australia that found the greatest consistency – ‘opulent and delicious’ – with Mansour noting increased complexity from time in the glass.

Jones said for those who enjoyed Cabernets, in his opinion there were none better than those from Down Under. ‘No question you should be buying Australian,’ he said. ‘For sheer quality and finesse, there’s nowhere else in the world that does Cabernet like this – except Bordeaux. These are world-class wines made by some of the world’s best winemakers.’

ENTRY CRITERIA:
wines had to be the latest release and labelled only as Cabernet Sauvignon from either Coonawarra or Margaret River

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Fermoy Estate, Reserve, Margaret River 2010
Decanter average score: 18.75pts/20 (95+pts/100)
Individual judges’ scores: Roger Jones 19 Pierre Mansour 18.5 Anthony Rose 18.5

N/A UK www.fermoy.com.au
Margaret River’s famed Wilyabrup zone is home to many of the region’s most celebrated estates, and Fermoy is one of the older vineyards in its heart. Today, a young, female winemaking team vinifies more than 30,000 cases in a winery adjacent to the old vineyard. Last year, Fermoy returned to Western Australian ownership after 12 years in the hands of a Swiss investor, with new investment promised in the vineyard and winery. Its Reserve Cabernet is the hand-picked fruit of a single block of dry grown vines planted in 1985 and matured in French oak barriques.

Roger Jones Intense explosion of dark berries on the nose, and a savoury, rich palate. Lingers with a very delicate and delicious soft coconut toast finish, evolving well. Nice liquorice mouthfeel.

Pierre Mansour Wonderful perfume of black cherry. High-quality toasty oak, textured, ripe fruit, dense, lots of flavour backed by ripe velvety tannins. Long. A serious Cabernet.

Anthony Rose Lovely black berry juiciness with well-integrated and well-crafted light vanilla oak and cleansingly savoury acidity on the finish. Classy, beautifully balanced young red with real personality. Outstanding.

Drink 2012–2025 **Alc** 14%

Anthony Rose



Rose is a multi award-winning writer, the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Australia and the wine correspondent of UK newspaper The Independent.

Rose’s verdict
‘This was one of the best *Decanter* tastings I’ve been involved with, for the exceptional quality and consistency of the wines. That three judges – without conferring – rated seven wines

‘Outstanding’ summed up just how superb it was. By and large, Margaret River elegance had the edge over Coonawarra concentration.

‘The Coonawarra Cabernets performed well, however, with many excellent wines from, by the looks of the results, familiar big company names such as Penfolds, Wynns, Wolf Blass, Katnook and Yalumba. It also showed good ageing tendencies. The big company ethos distinguished it from Margaret River where I see the top-scoring wines were mainly from smaller growers such as Fermoy, Lenton Brae, Night Harvest, Arlewood, Fraser Gallop and the famous Leeuwin Estate. Yet there was no shortage of individuality from both camps.

‘From a vintage point of view, the Coonawarra 2008s showed well, with one or two more mature wines also holding up. Margaret River had a stronger showing with younger wines, with the 2010 vintage looking good, along with 2009 and 2008. While it would be difficult to conclude much from sub-regions within Coonawarra without better knowledge of regional differences, the unique character of the Wilyabrup district of Margaret River was evident.’



Katnook Estate, Odyssey, Coonawarra 2005 18.75 (95+) **RJ** 18.5 **PM** 18.5 **AR** 19
£60–£61 **Berkmann Wine Cellars, Islington Wines, Nickolls & Perks**
Wayne Stehbins has been a mainstay of Coonawarra since 1979, transforming the original property of the region’s founder, John Riddoch. In recent years, diligent vineyard management and ongoing trials in trellising, leaf plucking, canopy management, soil surveys and yield monitoring have transported Katnook’s Cabernets to new heights of more even ripeness, avoiding the green and vegetal characters of the past. Odyssey is Katnook’s most powerful expression of Coonawarra’s signature variety, built for the long haul and bolstered by more than three years in new French and American oak barrels, with some parcels double oaked.

RJ Delicate palate of soft vanilla and bright berries; seems very youthful. Very well made wine by some class winemakers – essence of Coonawarra. Amazing wine dripping in red meat juice, berries and beautiful oak.

PM Lovely, smoky, developed nose, mellow, complex, spicy/leathery. Delicious fruit has evolved beautifully in bottle; generous, ripe tannins, very, very long. Superb. At its peak but will last.

AR Fabulous nose, slightly drying dark fruits with savoury, rich, umami-like characters on the palate – like soy and balsam. Very complex palate that is just slightly drying on the finish, but quite gorgeous now.

Drink 2012–2015. **Alc** 14%

Outstanding (continued) 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Night Harvest, John George, Margaret River 2010 18.75 (95+) RJ 18.5 PM 18.5 AR 19

£25 **The Wine Society**
Twenty-six years is a long time in Margaret River viticulture, and Andy and Mandy Ferreira have been involved in the establishment of some 3,000 hectares of vineyards in the region over this time. Contract harvesting at night remains a large part of their business, hence the name of their brand. They have produced their own wines since 2005, employing contract winemakers Kevin McKay of Forester Estate, who has grown and made wine in Margaret River since the Ferreras first arrived, and Bruce Dukes, one of the state’s most respected contract winemakers, and recipient of Western Australia’s Winemaker of the Year Award last year.

RJ Cassis fruit nose and soft tannins – quite confected, but as it opens up the finesse and purity really comes through to show a real gem of a wine. Lovely savoury overtones and the finish is very clean and fresh.

PM Beautifully scented, fine nose, plum, minty freshness, toasty new oak too. Round, rich palate, very classy new oak, fresh black fruit, really ripe tannins, long superb finish. A delicious, classy and harmonious style.

AR Attractively sweet cassis and mulberry fragrance. Lovely succulent palate of textured cassis fruit with an attractive purity of flavour and a fine cushion of supple tannins, a hint of chocolate and coconut oak, and savoury balancing acidity. Superb.

Drink 2012–2030 **Alc** 13.2%



Penfolds, Bin 169, Coonawarra 2008 18.75 (95+) RJ 18.5 PM 18.5 AR 19

£165 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Slurp**
Penfolds upholds a mantra to maintain the style of its classic wines in spite of the ever-changing winds of popular preference. For this reason, when single sub-region and French oak became the catchcries of the Barossa, rather than meddling with the multi-region, US oak recipe of Grange, RWT was born. In precisely the same manner, the single-region, French-oak Bin 169 has recently been introduced alongside Bin 707 Cabernet Sauvignon. From two prized Penfolds Coonawarra vineyards, this inaugural vintage arises from a season of refined and powerful Cabernet Sauvignon.

RJ Toasty, aromatic nose with jam conserve nuances. Very delicate flavours, hints of vanilla and berries and autumnal wild flowers, some violets too. Good tannin structure to allow it to age gracefully for a very long time. Of course it can be drunk sooner, but please wait.

PM Deep, elegant, sophisticated nose, lovely cedar fruit. Fine yet powerful palate, chewy ripe tannins and a big, bold finish – long, flashy fruit. A successful blockbuster style that leaves you impressed.

AR Nice liquorice, black cherry, toasty oak and cola-spice aroma. Fine fruit concentration, opulent cassis and blackberry richness. Nicely tarted up with acidity to keep it fresh, bringing necessary brightness and balance.

Drink 2012–2018 **Alc** 14.5%



Arlewood, Margaret River 2007 18.5 (95) RJ 18.5 PM 18.5 AR 18.5

£27 **Amathus, Food & Fine Wine, Wine Treasury**
Big changes are afoot at Arlewood. In mid-2007, the estate sold its 1988 planted Wilyabrup vineyard to Vasse Felix, acquiring a new vineyard south of the Margaret River township two years later. The estate’s 2007 wines were harvested prior to these changes. The ripe Cabernet of this warm season from a single block in the estate vineyard was matured for two years in half new and half second-use French oak. Just 700 dozen bottles were produced of the final wine of this era for Arlewood.

RJ Elegant, mocha, wild berry and earthy nose. Delicate savoury fruit palate controlled by tannin calling out for a spit roast lamb to go with this. Still some tannin so this will age gracefully for many years.

PM Very deep, surprisingly youthful appearance despite its age. Ripe, intense and upfront nose, blackberry fruit. Full, layered palate, huge flavour. Wow, this is impressive: ripe, soft tannins, immense power and balance.

AR Lovely, opulent, dark berry fruit succulence framed by bright, fresh acidity and nicely rounded by subtle oak; a stylish Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon with all of its ducks in a row. Five years old, going strong, beautifully balanced, tension between fruit sweetness, savoury acidity and fine-grained texture and with plenty of life ahead of it.

Drink 2012–2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Leeuwin Estate, Art Series, Margaret River 2008 18.5 (95) RJ 18.5 PM 18.5 AR 18.5

£33–£37 **Domaine Direct, Secret Cellar, WoodWinters**
No Cabernet in Margaret River has been more dramatically transformed over the past decade than this. Once a style of clunky oak, assertive tannins and haphazard ripeness, a complete makeover in the vineyards has produced more even ripeness and permitted earlier harvesting to capture the hallmarks of the variety, elevating this wine to its rightful position alongside the estate’s famous Art Series Chardonnay. Leeuwin’s Art Series philosophy is to represent its finest, most ageworthy wines, and its Cabernet now confidently meets this brief.

RJ Fresh sea breeze nose. Liquorice and a lovely intensity of berries, dried raspberries and vanilla. Lovely, young vibrancy to this, which gives a perfect texture in the mouth and long aftertaste. Happy to drink this now, but it will age; the fruit keeps coming back and tantalising my taste buds.

PM Deep and bright. Lovely purity and freshness, elegantly toasty. Fleshy, sweet fruit, beautifully balanced and fine, subtle, understated yet intense, and highly drinkable. A very classy style.

AR Leafy aroma moderated by astutely judged vanilla oak adds roundness and a degree of complexity to the juicy cassis fruit flavours which are etched with bright acidity in almost Bordeaux cru classé mode. Excellent.

Drink 2012–2022 **Alc** 13%

Coonawarra & Margaret River Cabernets

Outstanding (continued) 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Lenton Brae, Wilyabrup, Margaret River 2009

18.5 (95) RJ 18.5 PM 18.5 AR 18.5

N/A UK www.lentonbrae.com

Bruce Tomlinson’s 1982 estate is in the skilful hands of winemaker son Edward, who crafts a set of wines of ever-finer precision and purity. To this end, a sorting table was introduced in 2006, and cane pruning was initiated in the vineyard in 2007 so as to create, in his words, ‘richer, riper and less angular and austere fruit flavours’. His flagship Cabernet is a barrel selection of estate-grown fruit (tweaked with a little Merlot and a drop of Petit Verdot) from original, 1982-planted estate Wilyabrup vines.

RJ Perfumed fruit nose and a lovely herbaceous palate with golden plums, just toasted, with a touch of crème brûlée. This has savoury, spice and fruit, is balanced and very fine which will age gracefully. On my list to buy.

PM Vibrant, youthful, minty nose. Rich, layered palate, vibrant, deliciously ripe fruit and balanced oak; a sleeper. Excellent balance and length. A proper Margaret River Cabernet.

AR Sweetly fragrant blackcurrant and raspberry fruit; intense, juicy, dark mulberry and loganberry palate with a fine blade of acidity supporting the fruit freshness and a lovely succulent texture. Crowd-pleasing and classic.

Drink 2012–2035 **Alc** 14%

‘Coonawarra was certainly singing, but Margaret River stole the show here’ **Pierre Mansour**

Highly Recommended 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Fraser Gallop, Parterre, Wilyabrup, Margaret River 2010

18 (93) RJ 18 PM 17.5 AR 18.5

£32.99 **Berkmann Wine Cellars, Markinch Wine Gallery, Wine Direct, Wine Library**

Elegant, sophisticated nose, pretty and pure. Rich and powerful palate with intense tannins and savoury spices. Very well balanced overall with an almost saline mineral acidity. Promises a great future. **Drink** 2013–2040 **Alc** 14%



Koonara, Ezra’s Gift, Coonawarra 2010

18 (93) RJ 18 PM 18.5 AR 17.5

N/A UK www.koonara.com

Fine, smoky nose with bright red berry fruit and powerfully spicy liquorice and dark berry lift. Cinnamon, nutmeg and oregano on the palate, with an intense cassis and black cherry fruit richness, infused with exotic spices and a bright herbal undertone. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14.2%



Butler Crest, Margaret River 2010

17.75 (92) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 18

N/A UK www.greenpiper.com.au

Surprisingly complex, savoury nose – earthy with real character. Rich and long, lingering fruit, jumping out in delicate waves; blueberries and loganberries. Almost Bordelais in style albeit with a tad more power and sweetness of fruit. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 13.7%



Di Giorgio Family, Coonawarra 2008

17.75 (92) RJ 18.5 PM 17.5 AR 17

N/A UK www.digiorgio.com.au

Soft leather, spice and liquorice with powerfully rich, sweet, charry, coconut oak overlying blackberry. Full, gutsy palate with intense black fruit. Balance between oak and fruit is clever, offering a wine ready to drink now but will improve. **Drink** 2012–2025. **Alc** 14%



Evans & Tate, Redbrook, Margaret River 2009

17.75 (92) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 18.5

POA **PLB**

Attractive cassis fragrance with a touch of dried mint, leathery fruit, hints of cedar and mocha. Dense and layered, lots of flavour, grainy fine tannins; evolves in the mouth leaving tiny traces of various berries and plum fruits. Excellent. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14%



Hollick, Ravenswood, Coonawarra 2008

17.75 (92) RJ 18.5 PM 18 AR 17

£39.50 **Fortnum & Mason, Great Grog**

Rich, sweet mulberry jam and plums on the nose. Lovely, meaty flavour with violets and mulberries in the background. A lovely, intense, brooding wine which is evolving, leading to an earthy, mocha finish. **Drink** 2012–2019 **Alc** 14%

Highly Recommended (continued) 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Katnook Estate, Coonawarra 2009 17.75 (92) RJ 18.5 PM 17 AR 17.5
£18.99 [Berkmann Wine Cellars](#), [Loki Wines](#)
Mellow mocha spice with a slight gamey edge to the nose and a lot of sweet blackcurrant fruit. Lovely rich palate – amazing lingering depth which goes on for an age. Palate is a balance between meaty notes and fruit and toasty spices. **Drink** 2012–2040 **Alc** 13.5%



Patrick of Coonawarra, Home Block, Coonawarra 2008 17.75 (92) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 18
N/A UK [www.patrickofcoonawarra.com](#)
Defined nose, spice, vanilla oak and a slightly minty undertone. Intense, deep, penetrating, bloody wine – lovely texture and mouthfilling blackberry jam fruit ignites the taste buds with a touch of espresso hitting through. Will get better and better. **Drink** 2012–2040 **Alc** 13.5%



Reschke, Empyrean, Coonawarra 2004 17.75 (92) RJ 17.5 PM 18 AR 17.5
N/A UK [www.reschke.com.au](#)
Magnificent nose: fresh, fine, mellow, exotic spice and cigar box. A savoury, almost European balance of dark berry fruits underscored by notes of soy and balsam. Eight years old and still brooding away. Very persistent, with real richness and finesse and a soft, espresso finish. **Drink** 2012–2021 **Alc** 14%



Umamu, Margaret River 2008 17.75 (92) RJ 18 PM 18 AR 17
£35–£40 [Harlington Wine](#), [Wines Unfurled](#)
Sweet pipe tobacco and cassis nose with muscular fruit on the palate. Developing well, with a lovely, savoury finish but really does need food to show how good it is. Perfect with roast Chinese pork or duck. Classic Margaret River style. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 13.5%



Yalumba, The Menzies, Coonawarra 2005 17.75 (92) RJ 18 PM 18 AR 17
£26.99 [Berry Bros & Rudd](#), [Darts Farm](#), [General Wine Co](#)
Intense and inviting nose, then a lovely mouthfeel of rich, ripe, wild berries and lots of wild herbs. An intense, red brick flavour comes through with a dry mineral undertone. Powerful and satisfying. **Drink** 2012–2050. **Alc** 14.5%



Cape Mentelle, Margaret River 2010 17.5 (91) RJ 18.5 PM 16.5 AR 17.5
£30 [Moët Hennessy](#)
Pungent, toasty oak – creamy and modern. Lovely glazed berries on the nose and a blackcurrant fruit palate framed by vanilla and caramel oak. Will improve. Best to hold for a few years. Impressive. **Drink** 2013–2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Devil's Lair, Margaret River 2008 17.5 (91) RJ 18 PM 18 AR 16.5
£18.99 [Treasury Wine Estates](#)
Attractively sweet dark cassis, mulberry and liquorice fragrance. Structural, punchy style with intense, persistent fruit with a silky textural quality thanks to fine-grained tannins. A Margaret River red that's stood the test of time and should continue to do so for a while yet. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 13.5%



Fermoy Estate, Margaret River 2010 17.5 (91) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 17.5
N/A UK [www.fermoy.com.au](#)
Powerfully built Cabernet Sauvignon with nice purity of cassis fruit, well-integrated oak and refreshingly savoury backlift of acidity. Very well balanced with a long, lingering finish. Needs some time for the elements to fuse together. **Drink** 2012–2017 **Alc** 14.5%



Jim Barry, The First Eleven, Coonawarra 2005 17.5 (91) RJ 18.5 PM 18 AR 16
£29.99 [Liquid Pleasure](#), [ND John](#), [Planet of the Grapes](#)
Eucalyptus all the way – a big, brooding classic giant. Evolved nose of herb and liquorice spice with a meaty undertone. Succulent, dark berry, prune and plum fruit quality with liquorice spice. An enormous wine but fresh and exuberant. **Drink** 2012–2050. **Alc** 15%



Parker, Coonawarra Estate, Terra Rossa, Coonawarra 2008 17.5 (91) RJ 18.5 PM 17.5 AR 16.5
£22 [Australian Wine Online](#), [Great Western Wine](#), [Harper Wells](#), [Imbibros](#), [Selfridges](#), [Wooden Wine Box Co](#)
Strong tobacco nose with an undertone of eucalyptus. Umami palate of honey and soy –outstanding flavour and texture. This is potent and satisfying with persistent cassis flavour. Has the structure to age. **Drink** 2012–2040 **Alc** 14.5%



Peccavi, Margaret River 2008 17.5 (91) RJ 18.5 PM 17 AR 17
£29.99 [Peccavi Wines UK](#)
Appealing nose of mocha – gentle and fine. Rich in cassis fruit concentration in a powerful dimension that's full-flavoured and rich rather than complex. Great, luxurious, toasty, creamy vanilla ripple coming through. Generous and intense. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Sandalford, Prendiville Reserve, Margaret River 2009 17.5 (91) RJ 18.5 PM 16.5 AR 17.5
N/A UK [www.vickerywines.co.uk](#)
Smoky, tobacco nose, showing some discreet evolution. Accessible succulence of tannin, blueberries and hints of delicate cassis and some wild flowers. Modern, flashy and impressive with lovely roasted lamb juices on the finish. **Drink** 2012–2030 **Alc** 14.5%

Highly Recommended (continued) 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Swings & Roundabouts, Margaret River 2010 17.5 (91) RJ 17.5 PM 17 AR 18
N/A UK [www.swings.com.au](#)
Hints of woodsmoke and salami on the nose. Full, structured palate: delicious fruit, excellent tannic backbone, attractively ripe, bittersweet chocolate and dark fruits framed by a spine of savoury fresh acidity. **Drink** 2012–2022 **Alc** 14%



Wolf Blass Wines, Gold Label, Coonawarra 2008 17.5 (91) RJ 16 PM 18.5 AR 18
£15.50 [Cellar Vie](#), [Forth Wines](#), [Slurp](#)
Closed nose, yet to reveal underlying spice, liquorice, cassis and mint. Elegant, deep, intense, meaty palate with lively acidity and fine, succulent, fresh tannins. Plenty of finesse and power with an intense finish. Still in its infancy. **Drink** 2012–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Wynns Coonawarra Estate, Black Label, Coonawarra 2010 17.5 (91) RJ 17.5 PM 18.5 AR 16.5
POA [Treasury Wine Estates](#)
Elegant, creamy, vanilla oak nose with eucalyptus and delicate intense berries. Opulent, ripe palate that's packed with black cherry and cassis fruit richness with elegance. Seductive, bright wine offering lots of potential. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 13.5%



Wynns Coonawarra Estate, The Siding, Coonawarra 2010 17.5 (91) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 17.5
POA [Treasury Wine Estates](#)
Spice and cedar nose with real individuality and focus. Meaty, toasted blueberries with hint of vanilla. Dark berry fruits framed by a nice light touch of spicy oak and good bright acidity. A thick texture with a long, luscious, Morello cherry finish. **Drink** 2012–2030 **Alc** 14%



Balnaves, Coonawarra 2008 17.25 (90+) RJ 16.5 PM 18 AR 17.5
£25.99 [Fine Wine Co](#), [House of Menzies](#), [Liberty Wines](#), [Oz Wines](#), [Scarlet Wines](#), [Secret Cellar](#)
Intense cassis and cola aromas plus toasted brown bread and eucalyptus. Classic Coonawarra intensity of fruit bisected by bright acidity and infused with a lively herbal undertone that brings freshness, interest and personality. **Drink** 2012–2040 **Alc** 14.5%



Brand's Laira, The Patron, Coonawarra 2006 17.25 (90+) RJ 16 PM 18 AR 18
N/A UK [www.mcwilliams.com.au](#)
Dark, brooding undertones of balsamic and spice. Porty on first taste, then a lovely savoury nuance comes through. Lovely, juicy, succulent texture and yet incredibly fresh. Just starting to hit its stride and will age easily. Excellent crafting in the cellar. **Drink** 2012–2042 **Alc** 14.9%



Celestial Bay, Margaret River 2010 17.25 (90+) RJ 18 PM 17.5 AR 16.5
N/A UK [www.celestialbay.com.au](#)
Black cherry undertones and some sweet tobacco pipe smoke. Lovely sweet berry fruit backed by ripe tannins. Great powerful texture, soft vanilla oak and a delicate toasty aftertaste. **Drink** 2013–2017 **Alc** 14.5%



Hay Shed Hill, Margaret River 2009 17.25 (90+) RJ 18.5 PM 16.5 AR 17
£17.95 [Bancroft Wines](#)
Sweet mint and eucalyptus nose with green pepper and spice. Mouthwatering texture – thick and voluptuous – with fantastic balance and a nice textural succulence. Well made and evolving beautifully. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Heydon Estate, WG Grace, Wilyabrup, Margaret River 2007 17.25 (90+) RJ 16 PM 18 AR 18
N/A UK [www.heydonestate.com.au](#)
Strong oak and a polished, slightly stewed fruit nose. A slightly salty, mineral character to the rhubarb and cherry fruit which has a natural vibrancy. Extremely bright and juicy, lovely sweet fruit, long and lingering. Immensely classy stuff. **Drink** 2012–2020 **Alc** 14%



Koonara, Ambriel's Gift, Coonawarra 2010 17.25 (90+) RJ 17 PM 18 AR 17
N/A UK [www.koonara.com](#)
Camphor and spicy red fruit fragrance with hazelnut and tobacco hints. Rich plum fruit on the palate with vanilla notes and a toasty, lingering blueberry finish. Rich, long finish and fresh fruit that keeps coming back. Youthful and will improve. **Drink** 2013–2025 **Alc** 14.2%



Larry Cherubino, Wilyabrup, Margaret River 2010 17.25 (90+) RJ 18.5 PM 17 AR 16.5
N/A UK [www.larrycherubino.com](#)
Attractively fragrant, with a distinctly savoury, almost meaty, umami character to the nose. A modern, relatively voluptuous style with a long, brooding aftertaste. Sinewy framework, succulent black fruits. Buy this to cellar. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 13.8%



Ringbolt, Margaret River 2008 17.25 (90+) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 17
£9.99 [AC Gallie](#), [Cambridge Wine Merchants](#), [Darts Farm](#), [Fulham Palace Wines](#), [Tesco](#) 🇬🇧
Cedary, restrained nose with class and poise. Generous, intense, vibrant fruit palate. A compact structure and sweet, succulent length, good concentration and balanced, ripe, sweet cherry and cassis fruit etched with a fine blade of acidity. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14%

Highly Recommended (continued) 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Stella Bella, Suckfizzle, Margaret River 2008 17.25 (90+) RJ 18.5 PM 17 AR 16.5
£33.49 Bacchanalia, Chester Beer & Wine, Constantine Stores, Corks Out, Good Wine Shop, Planet of the Grapes, Reserve Wines, Selfridges, Vinology
Leafy, spiced, peppery nose, pungent and herbal. Rich and concentrated, opulent with fine tannins, cassis fruit infused with herbal undertones and hints of roasted green peppers. Meaty and spicy. **Drink** 2012–2050 **Alc** 14.5%



Evans & Tate, Metricup Road, Margaret River 2009 17.25 (90+) RJ 18.5 PM 16 AR 17
£19.99 PLB
Lovely, ripe, elegant plum nose with a hint of honeyed beeswax and coconut. Round, succulent fruit, integrated fine tannins, very harmonious and fresh. Lovely, pleasurable drinking here. Great feminine intensity rippling through the palate. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 14.2%



Rosabrook, Single Vineyard Estate, Margaret River 2010 17.25 (90+) RJ 18.5 PM 16 AR 17
N/A UK [www.rosabrook.com](#)
Mocha nose with ripe, intense mulberry fruit tones showing a good savoury facet. Generous, rich palate of smooth and ripe blueberry and cassis and excellent balance. With time this will evolve into something quite special. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 14%



Fuddling Cup, Margaret River 2010 17 (90) RJ 17 PM 17 AR 17
N/A UK [www.fuddlingcup.com](#)
Fragrant nose of pencil lead and distinctive spice. Ripe and opulent palate – a deep, concentrated wine with hints of eucalyptus, savoury overtones and soft, creamy tannins. Big, impressive style. **Drink** 2013–2025 **Alc** 14.6%



Wynns Coonawarra Estate, Glengyle, Single Vineyard, Coonawarra 2009 17.25 (90+) RJ 17.5 PM 17 AR 17.5
POA [Treasury Wine Estates](#)
Cocoa and cassis on the nose with quite exotic, jammy damson fruit. Flashy, potent, impressive red with lots of guts and good concentration of fruit supported by lively acidity and good length. A wine to age. **Drink** 2012–2035 **Alc** 14%



Leconfield, Coonawarra 2010 17.25 (90+) RJ 16.5 PM 17.5 AR 17.5
£17.99 Forth Wines
Exotic, flashy nose, peppery oak and opulent dark cherry and chocolate notes. Powerfully muscular and youthful palate – lovely texture with flavours of sweet redcurrant jelly, dried herbs and a lovely creamy finish. Evolving well. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Sandalford, Estate Reserve, Margaret River 2009 17 (90) RJ 17 PM 16.5 AR 17.5
£29 [The Wine Society](#)
Astonishingly minty eucalyptus nose with wild berries. Full, intense, flavourome palate of eucalypt, mint, sage and rosemary. Lots of garrigue character. Velvety, ripe tannins and powerful, sensuous mouthfeel. Very impressive and lingering. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Grace Farm, Margaret River 2011 17 (90) RJ 17.5 PM 17 AR 16.5
N/A UK [www.gracefarm.com.au](#)
Coffee and mulberry tones on the nose with a slight beef stock undertone. Very harmonious, fruity, effective Cabernet for current drinking. Well-structured tannins and lifted perfume. **Drink** 2012–2018 **Alc** 14%



The Yelverton Reserve, Margaret River 2009 17.25 (90+) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 16.5
£12.99 [Laithwaites](#)
Big savoury nose, quite meaty with green pepper. Round, fleshy, smooth palate that’s savoury, rich, lingering and full of layered fruit which has combined well with the oak. Nice succulence and bright freshness in a distinctly food-friendly style. **Drink** 2012–2025 **Alc** 14%



Reschke, Vitulus, Coonawarra 2008 17.25 (90+) RJ 17 PM 17.5 AR 17
N/A UK [www.reschke.com.au](#)
Fragrant, tarry nose with eucalyptus, mulberry and sweet blackberry. Opulent, powerful but elegant and there is a lovely undertone of mocha flavours which linger; just starting to soften and settle into early middle age. Power with elegance. **Drink** 2012–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Capel Vale Wines, Regional Series, Margaret River 2010 17 (90) RJ 18 PM 17 AR 16
N/A UK [www.capelvale.com](#)
Savoury, spicy nose. Fruit is quite closed but there’s delicate, clean fruit in the background. Velvety palate – a muscular style with ripe, sweet fruit concentration that clearly needs time to unfurl. **Drink** 2013–2018 **Alc** 14%



Juniper Estate, Margaret River 2008 17 (90) RJ 16.5 PM 18 AR 16.5
£19.50 [Adnams Cellar & Kitchen](#)
Lovely, seductive cola-spice aromas lead to a generous palate of succulent cassis and blackberry fruit that’s etched with liquorice and spice with well-crafted background oak. Substantial style. **Drink** 2012–2020. **Alc** 14.5%

Recommended 15–16.75pts

Wine	Score	RJ	PM	AR	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Larry Cherubino, Margaret River 2010	16.75 (89)	17.5	17.5	15.5	Briary, herbal nose with some spice and good, ripe mulberryish fruit. Chewy and big palate, minty on the finish, with well-defined tannins.	13.5%	2012–2016	£36.99	Hallgarten Druit
Pedestal Vineyard, Elevation, Margaret River 2009	16.75 (89)	17	17	16.5	Mellow, mocha nose, nice development. Rich, concentrated palate of spicy dark berry, fig and plum tinged with liquorice and cola character. Appealing.	13.8%	2012–2025	N/A UK	www.pedestalwines.com.au
Rosabrook, Margaret River 2010	16.75 (89)	16	17.5	17	Engagingly intense black fruit aromas with a touch of warmth. Round, harmonious, fleshy blackberry palate with ripe tannins that integrate well.	14.5%	2013–2025	N/A UK	www.rosabrook.com
Streicker Wines, Ironstone Block Old Vine, Margaret River 2009	16.75 (89)	18	16	16.5	Fragrant, fresh, spicy nose. Multi-layered palate, hints of cocoa butter. Juicy, supple tannins supporting an easy, food-friendly style. Nice, bright acidity.	14%	2012–2030	N/A UK	www.streickerwines.com.au
Twinwoods, Margaret River 2010	16.75 (89)	18.5	16	16	Liquorice spice on the nose. Elegantly structured with serious depth of flavour, high-quality oak and some notes of roasted lamb juices.	14%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.twinwoodsestate.com
Xanadu, Reserve, Margaret River 2009	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	17	Fresh, lifted nose; lots of charm. Big, rich palate, lots of depth and generosity. Velvety backbone and tannic muscle. Good structure, needs time.	14.5%	2012–2035	N/A UK	www.xanaduwines.com
Andrew Peace, Coonawarra 2010	16.75 (89)	17	17	16	Fresh, earthy nose. Round, smooth, full palate tinged with herbs. Bright and vivid with oak in the background, allowing the fruit and texture to shine.	14%	2012–2018	N/A UK	www.apwines.co.uk
Flametree, SRS, Margaret River 2010	16.75 (89)	17.5	17.5	15	Deep, closed nose with a herby, earthy quality. Lingering aftertaste of delicate berries and tight tannins, some green peppers and wild herbs. Needs time.	14%	2013–2017	POA	Auswineonline
Hamelin Bay, Five Ashes Vineyard, Margaret River 2008	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	16.5	Soft aromas of mocha coffee. Palate of espresso coffee, fresh fruit and evolved, almost leathery secondary characters and nicely layered tannins.	14.5%	2012–2026	£17.35	Ellis of Richmond, Wine Reserve
Reschke, Bos, Coonawarra 2004	16.75 (89)	16	17.5	16.5	Earthy, spicy, evolved nose. Bloody notes with concentrated dark fruit underpinned by aged characters of malt, truffle and soy. Developing.	14.5%	2012–2015	N/A UK	www.reschke.com.au
Brand’s Laira, Blockers, Coonawarra 2009	16.5 (88)	16	16.5	17	Morello cherry, violets, savoury black fruits and earthy hints. Full, round, rich palate, tannic muscle, lingering fruit and attractively savoury fresh acidity.	14.8%	2012–2025	N/A UK	www.mcwilliams.com.au
Killerby, Margaret River 2010	16.5 (88)	17.5	16	16	Rich nose of mulberries coming through with ripe, warm blueberries and cassis. Attractively juicy with a herbal, refreshing aftertaste.	14%	2012–2016	N/A UK	www.killerby.com.au
Laurance, River Icon Cabernet, Wilyabrup, Margaret River 2010	16.5 (88)	17.5	16	16	Sweetly fragrant cassis and liquorice on the nose with wild herbs. A palate of juicy fresh cassis fruit and a pleasant, creamy vanilla finish.	14%	2013–2025	N/A UK	www.laurancewines.com
Robert Oatley, Margaret River 2010	16.5 (88)	17	17	15.5	Delicate cigar box nose, smells quite expensive. Ripe, opulent mid-palate of cassis and plum richness framed by fine chocolatey tannins. Weighty.	14%	2012–2030	£12.99	Ehrmanns, Last Try Wines, Shenfield, Vagabond, Wine Circle
Wynns Coonawarra Estate, John Riddoch, Coonawarra 2009	16.5 (88)	17	16.5	16	Nose of fresh spelt bread, bright cassis and black cherry. Deep, intense luxury fruit palate which gives way to vanilla brioche and a cleansing finish.	14%	2012–2025	POA	Treasury Wine Estates
Xanadu, Margaret River 2009	16.5 (88)	18	15.5	16	Delicate savoury nose with wild brambles. Round, fleshy, high-acid palate, supported by layered fruit, dense, textured tannins and soft oak.	14%	2012–2025	£15.75	Exel Wines, Great Western Wine, Lancelot’s, Stony Wine Emporium, Swig
Bellwether, Coonawarra 2008	16.25 (87)	17.5	15	16.5	Plum fruit and cinnamon spice, very stylish. European-like poise with lovely palate intensity. Excellent balance and a firm-structured finish. Needs food.	13%	2012–2015	N/A UK	www.bellwetherwines.com.au
Howard Park, Leston, Margaret River 2010	16.25 (87)	18	15	16	Intense nose of rich, ripe plums and classy, new smoky oak. Lively palate, crisp acidity and flavours of glazed berries and custard.	14%	2012–2016	£21	Bibendum
Howard Park, Miamup, Margaret River 2010	16.25 (87)	18	15.5	15.5	Dusty, cedary and quite savoury nose. Attractive sweet fruit and herbal palate. Lovely drinking now – leaves a very pleasant aftertaste.	14%	2012–2023	N/A UK	www.burchfamilywines.com.au
Majella, Coonawarra 2009	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	Upfront mint and cassis aroma with a herbal quality. Masculine, red-blooded wine, with savoury spices and strong tannins destined for roast lamb.	14.5%	2012–2025	£22.99	Corks Out, Sipp, Worth Brothers
Penley Estate, Reserve, Coonawarra 2009	16.25 (87)	17	16	16	Notes of mint and blackcurrant on the nose. Very well-balanced palate – seems quite forward and drinking early. Touch of savoury coming through.	15%	2012–2025	POA	Alexander Wines, Moreno
Berton Vineyards, Reserve, Coonawarra 2009	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16	Closed, slightly meaty nose. Palate has a mint and balsamic undertone to the bright and juicy blackcurrant fruit which finishes with powerful tannins.	14.5%	2012–2020	£11.90–£13.32	Widely available via UK agent Hallgarten Druit
Capel Vale, Single Vineyard, The Scholar, Margaret River 2009	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16	Herbal, cedary and fragrant. Rich flavour and concentration. Some lamb juices on the palate with savoury, spicy and lingering damsons and sweet plums.	14.5%	2012–2020	£44.50	Top Selection
Katnook Estate, Founder’s Block, Coonawarra 2010	16.25 (87)	16	16	16.5	Blackcurranty on the nose with some spicy oak undertones, Lifted. Round, fleshy, succulent fruit palate with fine tannins and modest weight. Stylish.	13.5%	2012–2025	£11.99–£14.99	Chiswick Fine Wine, Elwood Wines, Taurus Wine, Vineyard Wines, Waitrose
Penley Estate, Phoenix, Coonawarra 2010	16.25 (87)	15	17	16.5	Dried mint and blackcurrant nose with liquorice and spice. Primary fruit richness and concentration with a mild garrigue undertone and zesty acidity.	14.5%	2012–2030	£12–£14 (2009)	Alexander Wines, Imbibros, Markinch Wine Gallery, Moreno, Noble Green Wines, North Coast Wines
Vasse Felix, Margaret River 2008	16.25 (87)	16	15.5	17	Scented, stylish, leafy nose. Weighty, round, bright fruit palate, sharp acidity and an almost Bordelais balance, if a tad on the sharp and austere side.	14.5%	2012–2028	£17.99	Champion Wines, Corks Out, Marks & Spencer, Noel Young, Oxford Wine Company, Slurp
Highbank, Family Reserve, Coonawarra 2008	16 (86)	15	17	16	Fresh, juicy loganberry and plum fruit aroma. Palate is chewy and chunky, with raspberries, rhubarb and custard creams. Well crafted and well balanced.	13.5%	2012–2017	N/A UK	www.highbank.com.au
Larry Cherubino, Cowaramup, Margaret River 2010	16 (86)	16	17	15	Grassy, stalky nose with savoury spice. Rich mocha palate – fruit is hidden behind the richness, and fine, fresh, savoury acidity that hints at the mineral.	13.8%	2012–2030	N/A UK	www.larrycherubino.com
Petaluma, The Hundred Line, Coonawarra 2010	16 (86)	16.5	16.5	15	Scented, creamy, oaky nose; fresh and modern. Opulent, powerful palate underscored by a eucalypt character and bright, fresh acidity. Needs to soften.	14.5%	2012–2030	£18.28	Bibendum
Hollick, Coonawarra 2009	15.75 (85+)	17.5	14.5	15.5	Fine vegetal aroma – fragrant and classy – with gamey notes. Toasty, spicy, aromatic, rhubarb and plum palate. Powerful and should age really well.	14.5%	2012–2035	£19.95	Abbey Wines, Great Grog, Harvey Nichols, Hitchin Wine Co, SH Jones, Slurp, Tanners, Uncorked, Wine Utopia
Jacob’s Creek, Reserve, Coonawarra 2009	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15	16	High-toned, cherry fruit and herb nose. Round, moderately intense fruit with liquorice tones in the background, and some stem ginger spice.	14%	2012–2025	£10.15	Ocado, Tesco Wine by the Case
McWilliam’s, Mount Pleasant, Jack, Coonawarra 2011	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	16	Aromas of dried herb, mint and chocolate. Blackberry and herbal flavours framed by succulent fruit, fine texture and bright, savoury acidity.	13%	2012–2025	£12.99	PLB Wines
Yalumba, The Cigar, Coonawarra 2010	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15.5	Pleasant cherry and rhubarb fragrance. Sweet, fleshy, easy fruit palate with hints of green capiscium in background and a leafy finish. Needs time.	13.5%	2012–2035	£13.99	Drinksdirect, Slurp, Auswinesonline, Winedirect
Jacob’s Creek, St Hugo, Coonawarra 2008	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	Extremely pungent mint and eucalyptus nose with liquorice notes. Punchy, structured palate, firm tannins, overwhelmed by the eucalyptus character.	14.5%	2012–2015	£27.15	Ocado, Sainsbury’s, Tesco Wine by the Case
Moss Wood, Margaret River 2009	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16	Toasted brioche nose and intense prune fruit. Thick, opulent, jammy palate – full of flavour. With the right robust food this super-ripe wine might just work.	14.5%	2012–2016	£45	Jeroboams, Laytons, Secret Cellar
Koonara, Angel’s Peak, Coonawarra 2009	15.25 (84)	16	15	15	Minty, herbal aromas and spicy, savoury notes. Deep, brooding, meaty palate with faintly balsamic hints to the blackcurrant and mint. Quite high acidity.	14.7%	2012–2020	N/A UK	www.koonara.com

My top three

Roger Jones

■ **Yalumba, The Menzies, Coonawarra 2005** This wine shows the whole ethos of the Yalumba stable, delivering a wine ripe for drinking now but that will evolve over many years. It cries out for roast lamb, to go with the deep, velvety anise palate. **18pts/20 (93pts/100) Drink 2012–2050**

■ **Fermoy Estate, Reserve, Margaret River 2010** To me the best wine of the tasting – an explosion of intense fruit, perfectly balanced with exotic toasty oak. For such a young wine it's already showing great appeal. The palate continued to excite for an age. **19 (96) Drink 2012–2025**

■ **Leeuwin Estate, Art Series, Margaret River 2008** Leeuwin continues to hit exceptional clarity and these wines are much more restrained than those of a decade ago, allowing the fruit to tantalise the palate, with great freshness from the sea breezes that come over the vines. **18.5 (95) Drink 2012–2022**

My top three

Pierre Mansour

■ **Leeuwin Estate, Art Series, Margaret River 2008** Since 2004 I have been watching the improvements winemaker Paul Atwood has made with this Cabernet. The 2008 is a very fine example and definitely announces Leeuwin's arrival on Margaret River's fine red wine scene. **18.5pts/20 (95pts/100) Drink 2012–2022**

■ **Night Harvest, John George, Margaret River 2010** The perfect handling of new oak enhances, not dominates, the fresh, perfumed, intense fruit. Night Harvest was a discovery for me at this tasting – and so good that I bought some for Wine Society members. **18.5 (95) Drink 2012–2030**

■ **Cape Mentelle, Margaret River 2010** This is a modern, polished wine which has all the ingredients to age magnificently. The big, ripe, tannic muscle is supported by layers of black fruit. Give this two years and I reckon it would gain another two points on my score. **16.5 (88) Drink 2013–2020**

My top three

Anthony Rose

■ **Lenton Brae, Wilyabrup, Margaret River 2009** Adjacent to Moss Wood, close to the Indian Ocean, Lenton Brae should be better known for this elegant Bordeaux-style Wilyabrup Cabernet Sauvignon, whose black and red fruit flavours are nicely complemented by a wisp of oak and velvet-textured succulence. **18.5pts/20 (95pts/100) Drink 2012–2035**

■ **Arlewood, Margaret River 2007** Just south of the Margaret River township, Arlewood makes a stylish, pure Cabernet Sauvignon whose concentration of fruit and maturation in French oak have given it terrific legs and a particularly attractive balance between fruit sweetness, texture and beautiful, savoury acidity. **18.5 (95) Drink 2012–2035**

■ **Penfolds, Bin 169, Coonawarra 2008** Thanks to more A-grade fruit in Coonawarra, Penfolds launched its first Bin 169 this year without detracting from the famous Bin 707. The result is a quite superb combination of liquorice and cola-spiced, black cherry fruit overlaid by toasty oak. **19 (96) Drink 2012–2018**

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Anthony Rose

Coonawarra may be ahead of Margaret River in terms of history and tradition, but it was the West that won in this exceptional line-up of Cabernet Sauvignons



Anthony Rose is a multi award-winning writer, the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Australia and the wine correspondent of UK newspaper *The Independent*

WITH SEVEN WINES scoring 18.5/20 points (95/100) and above, and 42 earning no less than 17 points (90), this was an exceptional line-up. Margaret River had the edge over Coonawarra, but the latter was by no means disgraced.

Two of the top seven Cabernets were from Coonawarra, as were 18 of the 42 Highly Recommended wines. Given that its modern wine era begins in the early 1950s, South Australia's prime Cabernet region has an advantage over Margaret River for history and tradition. This partly explains the dominance of big company names such as Penfolds, Wynns and Yalumba, hence more of a house style.

Broadly speaking, Coonawarra Cabs show generous, concentrated cassis richness accompanied by elegant tannins and polished oak with occasional edgy acidity. Most vintages entered were 2010, 2009 and 2008, but there were a handful going back to 2004. And as the results showed, when they're good, they age beautifully.

Margaret River, on the other hand, was founded in the late 1960s by pioneering professionals, and the small-grower ethos has been maintained. Names like Cape Mentelle, Leeuwin and Moss Wood – the latter a poor showing here (15.75/85+) – are well known, but it was encouraging to see so many new or newish names: Night Harvest, Arlewood, Fraser Gallop, Umamu, Lenton Brae, Fermoy, Peccavi and Swings & Roundabouts. Margaret

River's small-grower ethos gives it the edge when it comes to individuality, and the style is often closer to Bordeaux with that effortlessly leafy elegance and restraint underscored by subtle oak treatment.

While the best Australian locations for Shiraz are now firmly established, it's interesting to remember that when Max Schubert pioneered Grange in the early 1950s, he used Shiraz for Penfolds' top wine because there was insufficient Cabernet. And Margaret River wasn't even a twinkle in the Cullen and Moss Wood eye...

Leaving aside occasional pockets of Cabernet excellence such as Eden Valley and Yarra Valley, this tasting showed that Margaret River and Coonawarra are Australia's prime Cabernet Sauvignon regions. The tussle for long-term domination may be inconclusive given that preferences will be subject to factors such as vintage variation, style differences and personal taste, but the rivalry between them will ensure that there will always be much to talk about and enjoy.

'Margaret River had the edge over Coonawarra, but the latter was by no means disgraced'