

TYRRELL'S

Tyrrell's Wines has featured strongly in the thirty year history of Winewise. Time and again the semillon, chardonnay and shiraz wines of Tyrrell's have topped our reviews, and the tasting room and lab at Tyrrell's were places where I improved my skills as a wine taster three and four decades ago.

Historically there's much more to Tyrrell's Wines than that.

In 1858 Edward Tyrrell acquired 320 acres around where the winery now stands. He built a slab hut of ironbark timber that has stood the test of time and to this day, is one of the first things that comes into view when approaching the winery car park.

Edward named the property Ashmans and immediately began clearing the land and planting grape vines which extended to 30 acres of semillon, auerot and shiraz. The first vintage was in 1864.



Entering Tyrrell's car park with Edward's hut in the foreground. Old world exterior. New world wines.

Edward sired ten children, two of which were Edward George (known as Dan), born in 1871, and Avery, of the 1891 vintage. Dan took over the winemaking from his father and remained active in the business for several decades before dying unmarried in 1959. By that time Avery's son Murray was well and truly involved in all aspects of the Tyrrell's wine enterprise. Through producing highly regarded wines and his relentless promotion of the business, Murray became one of the best-known wine industry figures in Australia. He and Len Evans were two of my most important mentors. Murray died in October, 2000. His son Bruce and grandson Chris are now the faces of Tyrrell's.

I've known Bruce since 1972, and have maintained a keen interest in the wines of Tyrrell's since that time. In over four decades I've witnessed significant progress at Tyrrell's, but none as great as I've seen in the past decade, and it's that period on which I'll focus.

Bruce, Chris, Chief Winemaker Andrew Spinaze and senior red-wine maker Mark Richardson organised a series of tastings for us to show off some of Tyrrell's best, and to help illustrate their constant pursuit of ever-greater quality.

Before the wine comes the grapes, and before the grapes come the land. To help understand the Tyrrell's wine styles, it's essential to walk among the vines – and we did. The French have made countless billions out of romanticising “terroir”, which has led some scribes to believe they can taste the soil in the wines. It's pointless getting into debates where heart rules mind, but there is one thing I'm sure about in this case. Each of these vineyards imparts its own character to the wines it produces.

In the **4 Acres Vineyard** are the shiraz vines planted in 1879 by Edward Tyrrell. The soil is volcanic clay over limestone and this, one of Tyrrell's “sacred sites” is located to the right of the driveway, almost in front of the winery. It was here that the grapes for the legendary 1954 McWilliams Richard Hermitage were grown. The wine was made by Dan Tyrrell and bottled by Maurice O'Shea.

Johnno's Vineyard, originally known as Long Flat, was renamed after Bruce and Pauline Tyrrell's son John. It was planted in 1908 on sandy soils adjacent to Mary Ann's Creek at the southern end of the property.



HVD semillon vines on sandy soil

Photo by Lex Howard

The HVD Vineyard was created by the Hunter Valley Distillery Company (est. 1903). And is on sandy soil. Every time I walk in this vineyard I marvel at just how beach-like it is, and that's very typical of the creek-influenced geology in the Pokolbin region.

Stevens Vineyard (in fact two vineyards Glen Oak and Old Hillside), owned by Neil Stevens, is located on Marrowbone Road. Glenoak provides the material for Stevens Semillon, and has both sandy loam and darker, heavier soil. The Old Hillside Vineyard features dark clay over limestone, and within this vineyard is a small block of 1867 vines which provide the grapes for Tyrrell's Old Patch Shiraz. Neil Stevens' vines are dry-grown.

Short Flat Vineyard is on the opposite side of Broke Road from Tyrrell's winery and is planted on sandy alluvial soil that is ideal for semillon. The oldest vines were planted in 1923.

Belford Vineyard is situated about 10 km north-west of the winery, near the New England Highway, and is leased by Tyrrells from the Elliott family. Winemaker Andrew Spinaze describes the soil as "so fine it is almost like talcum powder". It's another non-irrigated site.

Now, the tasting. As my late colleague Len Sorbello often said. "It's what's in the glass that counts."

TYRRELL'S VAT 1 & JOHNNO'S SEMILLONS

Only about three tonnes of semillon is processed for Johnno's. All, of course, comes from Johnno's Vineyard. It is crushed into a stainless steel basket press with 100% stems. About 30% of Vat 1 is pressed with stems, and is sourced from a few key sites, the main one being Short Flat Vineyard. The grapes are picked a little riper than they were in the early days, but acid addition remains minimal.

2015 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon The fresh, lemony nose is full of life, and the palate is intense and linear. An impressive 2015. ★★★★★☆

2015 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon The nose is fuller than that of the Johnno's, showing hints of citrus. There's a subtle complexity which is probably lees-derived. This is a rich, textural semillon with a great acid line. ★★★★★☆

2014 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon Quite lemony. Seems a little older on nose and palate than one year. However, there's plenty of satisfying varietal flavour supported by acidity. ★★★★★

2014 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Altogether different. Quite complex, even slightly funky. Comparatively full lemony flavour with excellent acidity. ★★★★★☆

2013 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon Intensity with restraint. The classic lemony aroma shows out. What a beauty! Intense and long, with a great spine of acidity. ★★★★★

2013 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Close to Vat 1, but still shows extra complexity. It's rich and faintly funky, with great acidity. ★★★★★☆

2012 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon Lemony with a touch of snow pea sprout. Fresh but has green aromas and flavours. ★★★

2012 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Very fresh, with the faintest green edge, although it's not as herbaceous as the Vat 1. ★★★☆

2011 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon Shows the first signs of toasty development and is strongly varietal and very fresh. ★★★★★☆

2011 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Very lively, with attractive lemon grass overtones. It's slightly less advanced than Vat 1, in the Hunter "white burgundy" style. ★★★★★☆

2010 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon Comparatively advanced., but still showing citrus rather than toast. About ready. ★★★☆

2010 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Nicely developed. Fresh, and drinking well, with a slight grip on the finish. ★★★★★



2009 Tyrrell's Vat 1 Semillon A superb restrained semillon. It has developed richness, but hasn't yet entered the toasty phase. Powerful and long, with marvellous acidity. (\$57.00) ★★★★★
https://www.danmurphys.com.au/product/DM_796692/tyrrell-s-vat-1-semillon-2009&CA_6C15C=620010050001024154

2009 Tyrrell's Johnno's Semillon Again showing some attractive complexity, and the palate is texturally excellent. It's still very fresh and has a long life ahead. ★★★★★☆

SINGLE VINEYARD SEMILLONS

2013 Tyrrell's Stevens Semillon A full-flavoured, lemony semillon which is a good all-rounder with a long, crisp finish. Enjoy it now or cellar for a few years. ★★★★★☆

2013 Tyrrell's Belford Semillon Much more restrained than the Stevens. It's intense and tight, with steely acidity. Definitely a cellaring style. ★★★★★

2013 Tyrrell's HVD Semillon In between the Stevens and the Belford. It's a restrained, lemony semillon with a good middle palate and a racy finish. ★★★★★☆

2009 Tyrrell's Stevens Semillon A vibrant, powerfully lemony semillon with a wonderfully intense, long palate. ★★★★★

2009 Tyrrell's Belford Semillon A superb six year old semillon which isn't yet toasty. A magnificent wine of line and length. (\$26.00) ★★★★★
<http://www.winestar.com.au/tyrrells-belford-single-vineyard-semillon-2009>

2009 Tyrrell's HVD Semillon A full, rich lemon curd style with a faintly toasty overtone. It's drinking superbly but still has time to come. If I had to choose one wine to drink with lunch out of the whole semillon line-up, this would be it. ★★★★★

2005 Tyrrell's Stevens Semillon Beautifully developed yet still comparatively youthful.. Restrained and long, with at least a couple of years' development ahead of it. ★★★★★

2005 Tyrrell's Belford Semillon Vibrant lemon curd nose. Long and powerful, with a strong spine of acidity. Classic in every way, and needs more time. ★★★★★

2005 Tyrrell's HVD Semillon Sensational fresh varietal nose. Lemony and chalky on the palate, with uplifting acidity. It will be even better in 2018. ★★★★★

VAT 47 CHARDONNAY

Only a few decades ago Tyrrell's Vat 47 was one of a handful of chardonnays made in Australia. At that time it was also the best, and on strict allocation. Being allowed to purchase a case of Vat 47 in the 70s and 80s was definitely oneupmanship.

From that point on the spread of chardonnay was amazing, and regions like the Yarra Valley and Margaret River came to the fore. Vat 47 continued to evolve, and has now reclaimed its place with the best of them.

The stainless steel basket press, so important to the Johnno's Semillon style is now a major factor in the making of Vat 47. Andrew Spinaze avoids malolactic fermentation, and uses 50% cultured and 50% naturally-occurring yeasts.

"Natural for roundness. Cultured for tightness." Andrew Spinaze

The grapes are now crushed straight into the basket press, and the juice is cold-settled for 48 hours at 18°C. Use of the basket press allows more solids to be retained in the juice.

2015 Tyrrell's Vat 47 Chardonnay A fresh powerful, but restrained white peach style with a subtle lees influence. The palate is intense and well structured, with subtle oak. ★★★★★☆
30% new French oak. 100% basket pressed.

2013 Tyrrell's Vat 47 Chardonnay Power with restraint. Classy French oak wafts from the glass but doesn't dominate. The palate is tight, long and intense. (\$65.00) ★★★★★
30% new French oak. 100% basket pressed.
<http://www.wineselectors.com.au/product/tyrre22113-tyrrells-vat-47-hunter-chardonnay-2013>

2012 Tyrrell's Vat 47 Chardonnay Full, fresh and developing well, with a slightly funky edge. ★★★★★
10% new French oak. 25% basket pressed.

2009 Tyrrell's Vat 47 Chardonnay Intense and nutty. Beginning to show some development. Drinking very well. ★★★★★
20% (wooden) basket pressed.

2006 Tyrrell's Vat 47 Chardonnay Tropical fruit nose - pineapple, etc. Palate fully developed with some yellow peach. Round and soft. Drying out slightly on the finish. Drink now. ★★★★★☆
Cold pneumatic pressed.

JOHNNO'S SHIRAZ

The grapes for Johnno's Shiraz come from 1908 Vines in Johnno's Vineyard. Total destemming (except for 2014 where some stems were retained) is followed by a whole-berry ferment. There is no pre-ferment crushing. The wine is aged in new François Frères 2,700 litre foudres.

2014 Tyrrell's Johnno's Shiraz Superb blackberry and black truffle aromas. Rich, ripe and firm, with great balance and finesse. ★★★★★

2013 Tyrrell's Johnno's Shiraz A powerful ripe blackberry style that is very impressive. Fine, firm, long. ★★★★★

2009 Tyrrell's Johnno's Shiraz Very attractive blackberry nose. Minimal development showing so far, and this wine is only just beginning to open up. ★★★★★

2004 Tyrrell's Johnno's Shiraz Rich and earthy in a positive regional way. A classy medium-bodied style with fine tannins. Not yet at its peak. ★★★★★☆

Johnno's is a shiraz for the long haul. While it certainly offers drinking pleasure when young, its destiny lies in the cellar.

VAT 9 SHIRAZ

Although it has never been a big-production wine, Vat 9 is the red on which the reputation of Tyrrell's is founded. Murray Tyrrell introduced the vat numbering system in 1962, and since then Vat 9 has been sourced from a red soil strip that runs through the Weinkeller Vineyard and to those closest to the winery, including 4 Acres.

Like the Johnno's Shiraz, Vat 9 is aged in foudres, but only 30% of them are new. The first foudre was purchased for the 1994 vintage. According to winemaker Andrew Spinaze, the "new era" of Vat 9 commenced in 2004, so we tasted 2004-2014.

Roughly 1.5 gm/litre of acid is added – mostly at the time the grapes reach the winery. The 2004, 2005 and 2006 were hand-bottled and sealed with cork.



New foudre

Photo by Lex Howard

2014 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Marvellous purple-tinged colour. Opulence, spice, grilled meats. A Hunter shiraz for the ages. ★★★★★

December 17, 2015

2013 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Blackberries, spice and violets. Gorgeous palate. Fine and firm. ★★★★★☆

2011 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Fresh mulberries and summer pudding. An excellent medium-bodied style with fine tannins and a fresh-acid finish. (\$70.00) ★★★★★☆
<http://www.boccaccio.com.au/buy/tyrells-vat-9-shiraz-2011/TYRVAT>

2010 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Fresh red berry with a faint grilled meat “Rhône” overtone. A classic medium bodied Hunter shiraz. ★★★★★☆

2009 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Nice young colour. Fresh, intense blackberry nose and palate. Acid shows through on the finish. ★★★★★

2007 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz There's still some purple in the colour. Intense, blackberry/licorice aromas and flavours. Youthful, fine and firm. ★★★★★

2006 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz A beautiful fresh, mature regional style. Of the classic Hunter “Burgundy” genre. Beginning to drink well. ★★★★★☆

2005 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Intense dark berry with hints of tilled earth and mushroom. Still quite tight. Needs time to soften. ★★★★★☆

2004 Tyrrell's Vat 9 Shiraz Quite fresh for its age. Still has plenty of fruit sweetness. Entering what will be a wide drinking window. ★★★★★

There is no doubt that Vat 9 is one of the great red wines of the Hunter Valley. The palate weight is certainly vintage-influenced, but some of the slightly lighter years like the 2006 can have a pinot noir/Burgundian quality about them that I find particularly attractive.

While writing this article I discovered that Andrew Spinaze had just clocked up his 35th year at Tyrrell's. “Spinner's” winemaking time at Tyrrell's has been marked by constant change, and as chief winemaker he has remained at the cutting edge. His enthusiasm and constant pursuit of excellence and improvement is strongly supported by the Tyrrell family. That, together with the careful nurturing of well-established vineyards, keeps Tyrrell's at the forefront of Australian winemaking.

Very few Australian wine producers make such outstanding red and white wine.

Lester Jesberg

I strongly suggest you join Tyrrell's Private Bin Wine Club for access to Winemaker's Selection, Single Vineyard and Sacred Site wines. Members may arrange private tastings at the winery by appointment. **LJ**

<https://www.tyrrells.com.au/wine-clubs/private-bin>