



Chardonnay Winemaking insights in Margaret River

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XANADU
MARGARET RIVER



Chardonnay in Margaret River

- The History
- The Terroir
- Clonal selection – dominance of Gingin.
- Chardonnay and the Regional paradox? . . . Chardonnay is an extremely versatile variety
- The evolution of style, the winemakers fingerprint, and the swinging style pendulum.
- Margaret River Chardonnay has never been in a better place....Australian Chardonnay has never been in a better place!
 - International recognition (e.g Jancis Robinson, Andrew Jefford).
- Perception is always relative.....were we thinking the same thing 20 years ago when the Chardonnay style of the day was so successful?



The perception of style is relative.

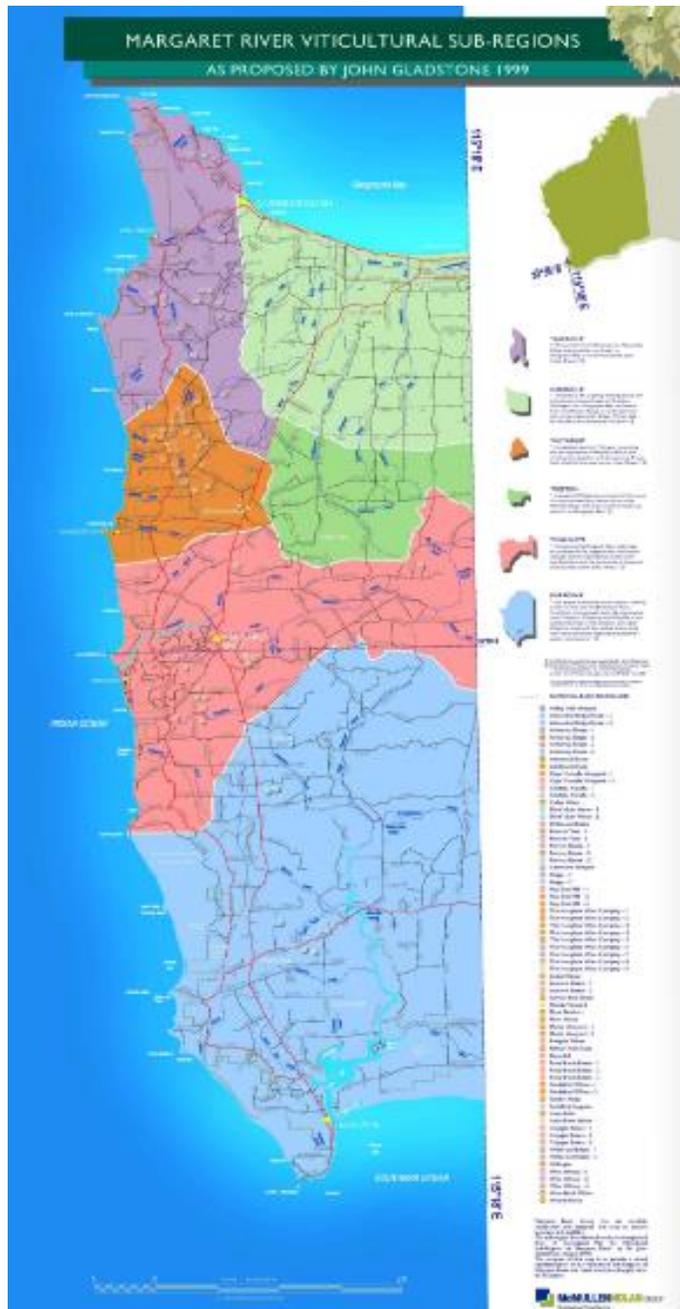
- What were we thinking 20 years ago?!



The 'style' conversation

- 'Style' can be more than just a set of wine descriptors it could also be described as a wine's personality – it's often easier to relate to well known personalities.
- It is the conversation itself that is a really important aspect of wine styles.





Margaret River Chardonnay insights ... Perspective.

- Conversation happens at many levels but is most effective in context of wider wine community (at local, regional and national level).
- The conversation around Cabernet has been happening at regional Margaret River level tastings hosted at Vasse Felix for many years.
- Oct 2015 was inaugural regional **Chardonnay** tasting.
The tasting/ conversation format:
 - 50 producers (blind)
 - 83 samples (unfinished, single vineyard)
 - Grouped by sub-regions purely to give some context.
 - Vineyard location indicated on map.
 - Technical information shown for each sample.



Technical information sheet at VF Chardonnay tasting.

- Sub - region
- Clone
- Soil Type
- Tonnes / Ha
- Vine Age (years)
- Vine Row Spacing (m)
- Row Orientation
- Pruning
- Irrigation (yes/no)
- Date Harvested
- Harvest Method
- Harvest Baume
- Harvest TA
- Harvest pH
- Whole bunch pressing (yes/no)
- Juice settling time
- Solids in juice (NTU)
- Yeast type
- Nutrient Regime
- Stirring Program
- Date SO₂ Added
- MLF (yes/no/partial)
- Vessel type / size

Key points from 2015 regional Chardonnay tasting.

- Premium Chardonnay production the main objective of tasting (predominantly barrel fermented wines).

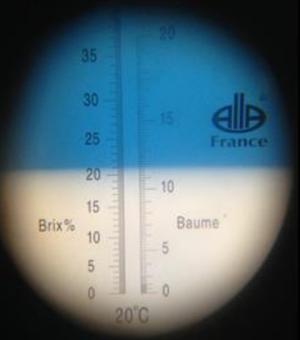
- 2015 Chardonnay harvest dates: 29th Jan (Carbanup) – 10th March (Karridale)
 - 2015 was an early season, but it is the length of the season in MR which is interesting.

- Harvest Maturity – a driver in style direction.

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| Baume Range: | 11.3 – 14.0 | Average 12.3 | (only 6/83 above 13.0 Be.) |
| pH range: | 3.0 – 3.45 | Average: 3.25 | |
| T.A. range: | 5.9 – 10.1 | Average 7.9 | |

- Yield Average: 4.2 Tonnes /Ha (1.7 Tonnes/acre)

- Hand picking still preferred method for premium Chardonnay (75%)
- Similarly whole bunch pressing (approx. 75%),
- Generally minimal settling.
- Yeast: Natural fermentation 56/83 samples (67%)





- Solids level: wide range - average around 300 NTU
 - Possibly higher as many people indicated '100%' or 'Full solids' on tech sheet. 300 NTU is purely the average of the data expressed as NTU.
- Nutrient regime: no significant trend other than majority (>80%) use various nutrient supplements, with increasing number of producers checking and adjusting YAN levels prior to ferment.
- MLF: 65% None 27% Partial MLF 8% Full MLF
 - Trend away from MLF – intensity/generosity of Gingin clone carrying the natural acidity.
- SO₂ adds: timing varies - different schools of thought.
 - Early SO₂ adds to discourage MLF, capture primary fruit.
 - Later adds to capture appropriate sulphides.
 - Later adds to encourage mouthfeel.
- Lees stirring: different schools of thought.
 - Most people doing some stirring, different regimes.
 - Some preferring not to stir, as they feel there is plenty of texture in Gin Gin Chardonnay already.
- Oak: 225 and 228L barrels still most popular vessels though more puncheons around these days. Pairing back % new oak, using tighter grain barrels.

Chardonnay. The Style conversation . . .

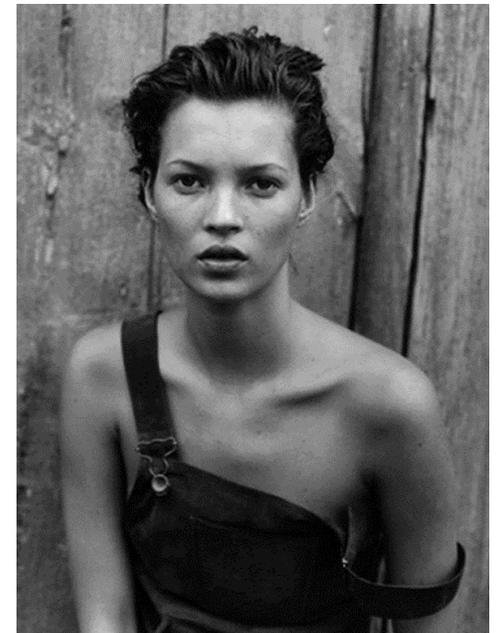
- **‘Old school’**

- Like it or not, obvious, rich/buttery styles were what made Chardonnay popular 20 years ago. There is still a (small) niche market out there.
- A few producers making a small amounts of unashamedly rich buttery wines (as well as tighter styles), with commercial success.
- Niche market, less of these ‘old school’ wines to choose from.



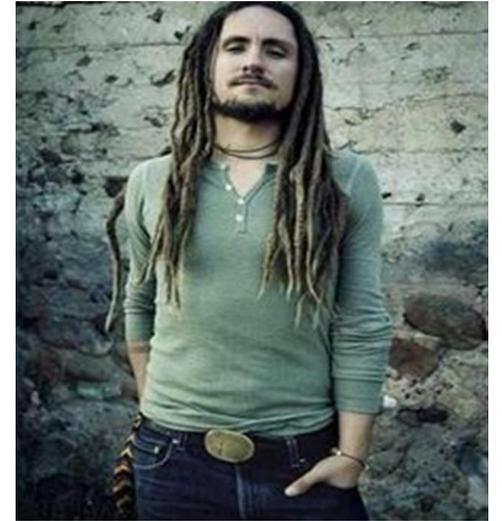
- **‘New school’ – contemporary Chardonnay in M.R.**

- Certainly the predominant style direction in Margaret River.
- Finer, minerally, tighter focused ‘new school’ styles are responsible for the overall resurgence of Chardonnay in the market.
- Incorporating complexity to these finer wines.
- Keep in context – Margaret River is generally in the ‘more generous’ bandwidth of the new school style.



Chardonnay. The Style conversation . . .

- **Natural Wines** – a growing niche market.
 - What actually qualifies?
 - Natural wines more accepted in Eastern states
 - Small but emerging band of ‘Natural’ producers in MR.
 - Biodynamic success (i.e. Cullens)
- **Funk** – the complex polarizer?
 - Bona Fide winemaking term (recent MW exam question).
 - Categories of Funk (i.e. struck match, compost, cheese, savoury, flint etc.).
 - The origins of Funk (i.e. vineyard, thiols, solids, fermentation, stirring etc.).
 - Can we have too much of a good thing?
 - Consumer understanding.



Chardonnay. The Style conversation . . .

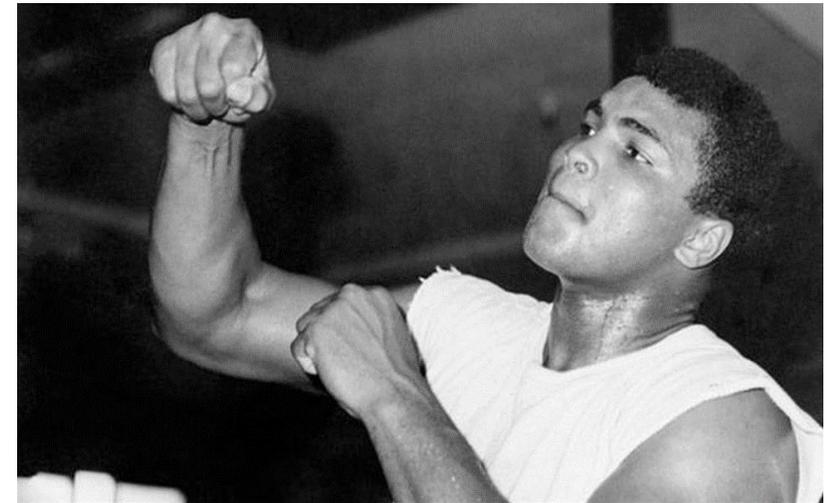
- **Elegant**

- Purity and respect for the fruit.
- Finesse and sophistication.
- Balance.
- Context (i.e . An 'elegant' wine in Margaret River may be considered a powerful wine in context of a cooler region).



- **Powerful**

- Popularity of Chardonnay; it has Flavour!
- The different spectrums of Chardonnay intensity.
- Powerful, generous Chardonnay is one of Margaret Rivers strong suits – it resonates well with consumers.
- Elegance and Power do not need to be mutually exclusive.



Style over substance . . . or Substance over style?

- We can have both . . . But we need to ensure substance is in the equation. Relying purely on a style, without the substance, will always run the risk of becoming a fashion victim.
- Diversity of Styles in Margaret River is a strength.
 - Maintaining diversity within (and between) regions strengthens our Chardonnay position on Global market.
 - Diversity helps to future-proof the ongoing success of Chardonnay.
- Confidence in exploring new techniques/sites/directions and matching winemaking techniques to the appropriate fruit (and vice-versa).
- Personality is key
 - Varietal integrity.
 - Regional identity
 - Vineyard personality
- **The Future:** Hopefully in 20 years time we will be able to look back and see a golden era of diversity, where it was the personality of the vineyard, and the variety, which was celebrated more than that of the winemaker.





Acknowledgements

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