

## GRAPE & WINE REGIONS

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SA's Southern Fleurieu Celebrates Its Geographical Indication and Looks to the Future  
by Sonya Logan

Five years ago, Grapegrower & Winemaker published a story that marked the release of the first commercial wine to be produced by a grower in the South Australian district of Yankalilla.

The wine was made by Adelaide obstetrician Bruno Giorgio, in partnership with his wife Ginny, under a label that was then called Fleurieu Estate. In the article, Giorgio predicted that by 2000, the region would experience an explosion of small producers.

As to how accurate Giorgio's prediction has been probably depends on your definition of 'explosion'. Suffice to say, back in 1996, Giorgio's vineyard was among just three in the region. Today, the Yankalilla district – or Southern Fleurieu as it is now officially known – boasts 32 vineyards, which vary in size from one to 80 acres, three small-scale production facilities and five cellar door outlets. And, it has recently been entered into the Register of Protected names.

President of the Southern Fleurieu Winegrape Growers & Winemakers' Association, John Sanderson, of Trafford Hill Vineyard, said growth in the region over the last five years had largely been facilitated by its reputation as one of "the last untapped, top-class winegrowing areas in South Australia". And yet, he hastens to point out that winegrape growing is not a recent phenomenon in the area.

"Vineyards actually occupied the Southern Fleurieu back in the 1840s," Sanderson said. "In fact, Robert Norman, whom the town of Normanville is named after, grew 40 acres in the 1850s." But, the commercial vineyards fell away as the area became depopulated. It picked up again when, in 1992, John Gladstone's stated in his book, *Viticulture and Environment*, that the region, at least in climatic terms, had "arguably the best conditions of all in mainland South Australia for table wine production".

"I believe this to be a region with exciting potential for viticulture," Gladstone's stated. "The temperature and sunshine data point to a wide range of table wine styles, from full-bodied Bordeaux and Rhone styles at low altitudes to classical cool-climate styles from about 200m up."

Maritime conditions benefit the majority of vineyards in the Southern Fleurieu. Four vineyards enjoy sea views. The average rainfall is 500-600mm, most of which falls during winter. Sanderson said almost 500 acres of winegrapes were now growing in the Southern Fleurieu, and the average vineyard measured about 10 acres. Several varieties had been planted by the region's vignerons, with around a third of the total planting area taken up by Shiraz, a third by Cabernet, and the remainder divided between white varieties and other red varieties. "Our main red is Shiraz, which is fairly closely followed by Cabernet. We also have Pinot and a few other lesser varieties which are being trialed, such as Sangiovese and Pinot Gris. Chardonnay is the predominant white towards the southern end of the region where it is a little cooler. Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon are mainly planted around Victor Harbor," Sanderson said.

### **Small-scale Production Facility**

"Shiraz, Cabernet, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc seem to do best under our conditions, and I think we will be able to add Chardonnay to this list once it comes into production." Although the Southern Fleurieu does boast three small scale production facilities, white wines are generally processed elsewhere, such as in neighbouring McLaren Vale. But, Sanderson believes the region will have its own full-scale, commercial facility within five years.

"It'll probably be a co-operative venture. There are some fairly wealthy people involved in vineyards down here who will probably instigate such a facility, and the region's production

will warrant one in the not-too-distant future,” Sanderson said.

The first cellar door in the Southern Fleurieu was opened by Bruno Giorgio six years ago, and was soon joined by cellar door facilities at Scotts Victor Harbor Winery & Vineyards, Mt. Jagged Wines, Allusion Vineyard and Trafford Hill Vineyard. Sanderson said four more outlets were in the pipeline. “We have five vineyards now selling their own wine. There are another two about to hit the market and there are another two on the drawing board. One of our chaps sells all his wine to export markets. And, there are a lot of other growers in the region selling grapes to Southcorp, Hardy’s, Banksia and the like for premium labels.”

Now that the geographical indication of the Southern Fleurieu has been entered into the Register of Protected Names, Sanderson said the next step for the region was to develop greater links with regional tourism. The Southern Fleurieu is renowned for its natural attractions, including its beaches, conservation parks and whale watching, and encounters many tourists as they make their way down to the popular seaside town of Victor Harbor or Kangaroo Island.

The west shore of the Fleurieu Peninsula is already popular with diving enthusiasts, and will significantly increase in popularity with the imminent scuttling of HMAS Hobart in Yankalilla Bay to create an artificial reef. The reef is tipped to be a premier eco-tourism diving site and a valuable tourist attraction for the state. It is the aim of the region’s cellar door operators to lure many of the visitors to the reef. “Obtaining our geographical indication was a big goal for us. Having reached that, people are now asking, ‘where to now?’ Strengthening our link with regional tourism, particularly wine and food tourism, is one of next objectives.

Organizing our own regional field days and seminars is also on the list, and one of our big aims is to introduce our own quality control system. There are already a lot of vineyards in the area involved in QA programs as a means of selling grapes to the ‘big boys’, but having our own would prove very beneficial. With 27 wines being produced in the area now, we’ve also got plans for a regional wine show, which is being proposed for next year.”

Sanderson believes that plantings of winegrapes in the Southern Fleurieu have steadied.

Real estate prices were rising and very little land remained available for purchase.

Consequently, he said, any new plantings were likely to be in the range of five and 10 acres, carried out primarily by hobby farmers.

### **Jerry White, Mt. Jagged Wines**

Location of vineyard: Main Victor Harbor Road, Mt. Jagged, eight kilometres south of Mt. Compass.

Year of first plantings: 1989

Current size of plantings: Approximately 70 acres (28 hectares)

Varieties planted: Shiraz (10 acres), Merlot (10 acres), Cabernet Sauvignon (10 acres), Chardonnay (20 acres), Semillon (20 acres).

Vineyard site characteristics: Elevation of 250-320 metres; soils consist of a loamy/sandy topsoil over a heavier clay subsoil, with considerable ironstone in the area planted to the red varieties; average annual rainfall of between 800-1000mm; we irrigate using drip irrigation from a 12-acre dam; climate is cool, and can be cold and windy; average temperature during the growing season is approximately 25°C.

Main pest and disease concerns: Mildew, birds and lightbrown apple moth. Any other concerns: Vigour, which we’ve tried to overcome by installing a second cordon wire on the Merlot and Shiraz.

Trellising system used: VSP

Average yields: Four tonnes per acre is the optimum target we prune to achieve.

Winemaking and/or cellar door activities: Most of our grapes are contracted and some we use for our own production. Our own wine production, which is processed and made at Boar’s Rock, in McLaren Vale, varies from year to year depending on crop yields.

We make a Semillon, a Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon, a Shiraz/Cabernet Sauvignon and a Chardonnay under our Mt. Jagged label. We do not have stock of all items as we just make up small batches from excess – currently we have a Semillon and Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon for sale. Our wines are sold via cellar door, which is open on weekends, and in restaurants in Adelaide, Sydney and the Fleurieu Peninsula. They range in price from \$12-\$18.

Any expansion plans for the vineyard: We do not have any plans to expand the vineyard at this stage as our aim is to build cellar door sales to take advantage of the scenic views we

boast of the Coorong.

Thoughts on the future of the Southern Fleurieu: The South Fleurieu has great potential due to the availability of natural, high-quality water. Being a cool climate area close to the Adelaide market, it is easily accessible to the wine-loving public. If the growers in the region keep their crops low yielding, and use high standards of viticulture in their vineyards, then high-quality premium wines can be made by taking full advantage of the distinct cool climate flavours.