

The Victorian Pinot Noir Workshop
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A forum to exchange knowledge and improve the breed

Objectives

The objective of the workshop is to provide an environment where unfinished wines can be critically assessed by winemakers and the collective wisdom and experience of the group can provide solutions to problems or inspiration for further improvements.

The Victorian Pinot Noir Workshop

Commenced in 2002

Open to producers of Pinot Noir from Victoria only

- Victoria has over 20 defined wine regions, yet we struggle to capture the share of voice and recognition deserved for the quality of wine produced.

Was the initiative of Clare Halloran, winemaker at Tarrawarra Estate in the Yarra Valley and has been organised by the same committee since the inception. The committee includes David Bicknell (Oakridge), Matt Harrop (Shadowfax), Luke Houlihan (Long Gully Estate) and Steve Flamsteed (Giant Steps)

Loosely modelled on Steamboat Pinot Noir in Oregon and the Southern Pinot Noir Workshop in New Zealand

The Victorian Pinot Noir Workshop

Mechanism

Three day event held in the last week of November each year.

Up to 3 blind tasting sessions per day where wines are assessed in brackets of 6 by tables of six.

- Individually tasted
- Discussed as a group
- Session convenor is the only person in the room who knows the order of the wines or what wines are in the bracket
- Group discussion held to describe the wine, identify any issues with the wine and then offer any advice regarding the observed issue
- Wine is unmasked, the winemaker then invited (shamed) to describe the winemaking, any issues and seek solutions to issues raised

The Victorian Pinot Noir Workshop

Critical Components

WINE

- Current-vintage unfinished workshop session wines are the most important part of the workshop
- Previous-vintage “finished” wines are also brought to taste in a relaxed informal session.
- Benchmark wines; two types:
 - New world and unknown regions
 - Burgundies – the home of Pinot Noir and inspiration for many pinot noir producers
- Dinner wines – to promote thought, discussion and inspiration (and to show off or influence people)

The Victorian Pinot Noir Workshop

Critical Components

CONFIDENTIALITY, RESPECT AND COMMERADERIE

- The wine industry is a unique fraternity – we actively seek the counsel of our competitors
- The success of the workshop sessions, and therefore the whole event, relies on strict confidentiality of all involved

WORKSHOP ATMOSPHERE

- No shoes for the committee
- No media*
- No PR from the event
- No leisure activities*
- Long days – first tasting starts at 8am, days finish at 6pm.
- No frills

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Critical Components

HONESTY

- Detailed information about each workshop wine must be provided to participate. Details include potentially commercially sensitive information, such as:
 - Crop load
 - Winemaking details
 - Production volume
 - Target retail pricing
- Honest assessment of wines is critical during workshop sessions, and brutal honesty is encouraged when discussing observations of workshop wines - "grab a glass and leave your ego at the door"

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Critical Components

LATEST INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

- Each year the workshop has focussed on a contemporary theme or issue and had the highest calibre guest speakers attend to inform our delegation

TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE

- Comprehensive laboratory analysis is provided for each workshop wine, allowing the delegates to understand observations and calibrate their palates.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

- The workshop is held in Hepburn Springs, which is not part of a significant wine-producing region, thereby ensuring that the entire delegation remains for the duration of the event, forcing participation in the most critical exchanges of information – over a glass of wine at dinner.



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Critical Components

EXPANDING INFORMATION PROVIDED

- Each year we have increased the depth of information provided to the workshop, encompassing marketing, organics and biodynamics, winery engineering and design and other topics not directly related to the making of great Pinot Noir.

RETURN DELEGATES

- Over the seven years the workshop has been running, we have had a solid core of return delegates, with approximately 80% of each workshop delegation having attended the previous workshop.

FEEDBACK

- We obtain feedback at the conclusion of each workshop and incorporate the ideas and criticisms into our planning of future workshops.

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