

## A taste of elegance in Orange

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Circling the upper slopes of Mount Canobolos in central New South Wales, Orange is one of the state's most exciting wine regions. It may not have the profile of the Hunter Valley or the history of Mudgee, but its high altitude, cool climate and long growing season often result in wines of greater elegance and distinction than its better known neighbours.

The Orange Wine Region is centred on the city of Orange some 260 kilometres west of Sydney - a three hour drive through the Blue Mountains. It is part of the Central Ranges Zone of New South Wales alongside Mudgee to the north and Cowra to the south, and is the highest wine growing region in Australia, with vineyards dotted on the hillsides between 600 metres and 1100 metres above sea level.

The altitude makes for some challenging conditions for the 55 vineyards in the area. Many of the best sites suffer from howling winds, winter temperatures are regularly south of freezing, and spring frost can be common and devastating. But for the growing number of local winemakers who brave the elements, the cool-climate flavours that survive to the bottle are more than enough reward.



### A history of Orange

Following a few modest grazing attempts dating back to the 1820s, Orange sprang to life when gold was discovered in 1851 at nearby Ophir, leading to the Australian gold rush. The township became a major trading centre for gold with significant agricultural development to support the rapidly growing local population.

Despite this rich farming history, it wasn't until the early 1980s that commercial plantings of grapes for winemaking began. Today there are 1670 hectares planted to vine - 60% red and 40% white - and 25 cellar doors open to the public.

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### Cumulus Wines

The largest of these is Cumulus Wines, home to the former Rosemount winemaker Phillip Shaw and his three brands - Climbing and Rolling under Cumulus Wines and his family-owned Phillip Shaw Wines. The latter's cellar door is situated some 900 metres high at the picturesque Koomooloo vineyard, and Phillip spends most of his weekends here talking wine to its many visitors.

Phillip won the Winemaker of the Year Award at the highly regarded London International Wine and Spirit Competition in both 1986 and 2000, and it shows in the consistent quality of his wines. Of the whites, the No. 11 Chardonnay 2007 (\$30) is my pick, fermented with native yeast and kept in French oak for the following 10 months where it is stirred regularly and matured on yeast lees. The result is a rich and toasty chardonnay carried by enough vibrant citrus flavours to ensure a long, creamy finish.

Of the reds, the No. 5 Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (\$75) is nothing short of outstanding - medium bodied with delicate dark berry fruit flavours and soft, well integrated oak. With careful decanting it's already drinking beautifully, but will go to another level over the next decade.

### Prince of Orange Wines

A few clicks down Escort Way you'll find Prince of Orange Wines. Established in 1996,



owners Harold and Coral Brodersen keep their vineyard as lean as their wines, focusing on two varieties that thrive in the cool climate.

The sauvignon blanc 2009 (\$18) is typical of many in the region, with fresh tropical flavours up-front joined by a crisp, citrus finish. The cabernet sauvignon 2005 (\$22) shows enticing cool climate characters again, with red berries and hints of peppermint on the nose and sweet berry fruit flavours carried by soft tannins and cinnamon oak on the palette.



### **Brangayne of Orange**

Further up the mountain is Brangayne of Orange - undoubtedly one of the most stylish producers of the region. The property features two vineyards located on the north-eastern slopes of Canobolas at about 900 and 1000 metres respectively. Formerly pome and stone fruit farms, the fruit trees were replaced by vines in 1994 and Brangayne has gone on to establish itself as one of the most awarded wineries in the region ever since.

Their signature 2004 Tristan blend (\$29) of cabernet, shiraz and merlot is best known, but for me the 2006 pinot noir (\$32) is the stand-out, with wild berry aromas and hints of game on the nose and a complex and intriguing palette of plums, soft tannins and balanced natural acidity. This took out a

gold medal at the 2008 Cowra Wine Show.

### **Patina**

On the other side of town is Patina, established by winemaker Gerald Naef. Gerald grew up in the vineyards of California before immigrating to Australia and going on to establish his own winery in 1999. He has since planted a wide range of varieties, including pinot grigio, riesling, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, pinot noir, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and shiraz.

Of the whites, his 2005 sauvignon blanc (\$34) distinguishes itself from the wealth of New Zealand wines on the market, maturing for 18 months on French oak. This gives a long, creamy finish to complement the grassy passion fruit flavours upfront, and the extra body makes it an intriguing wine. Of the reds, the 2004 cabernet shines (\$27), with complex herbaceous characters mixing with the blackcurrant fruit. The finish is a touch green, but this will no doubt mellow in the vintages ahead as the vines mature.



### **Elegance and diversity**

Given the diversity covered above, it's hard to paint the wines of Orange with one brush, but the cool climate does produce one consistent characteristic - elegance. You won't find the explosion of fruit from many lower lying, warmer regions. Instead, Orange wines show a restraint that makes them ideal companions to food. And the many fantastic Orange restaurants give you plenty of opportunity.



### **Restaurants**

Top of the list is the Union Bank Wine Bar. Occupying a group of heritage listed buildings in the heart of town, this unpretentious food and wine hub combines a restaurant, bar and cellar in a laid-back, reservation-free environment. Order yourself, say, the roasted venison from local producer Mandagery Creek (\$27) and a glass of the house grenache mourvedre (\$7) at the counter, then sit at the bar or find a table in the courtyard and soak up the atmosphere.

### **Accommodation**

There are a wide range of accommodation options available, including humble beds at hotels [Parkview](#) and [Carcoar](#) or more private dwellings at the many self-contained chalets. Check out the [Orange City Council](#) website for the latest on these.

One of the newest and most luxurious options is de [Russie Suites Apartment Hotel](#). Located just off the main street in the town centre - stumbling distance from the Union Bank Winebar mentioned above - these well appointed suites offer a variety of accommodation, ranging from king studios to three-bedroom family apartments, all

finished in a slick, Tuscan inspired style.

Each comes with a flat-screen TV complete with Austar, high-speed wireless broadband and luxurious ensuite or bathroom (most with spa baths), and guests are also treated to a European style breakfast basket each morning.

### **Upcoming Events on the Orange Calendar**

#### **[Taste Orange - Frost Fest](#)**

The Taste Orange Frost Fest kicks runs from 31 July to 9 August, so there is no better time to go and explore all that this fantastic region has to offer.

This winter festival has a strong focus on arts and community, with a packed schedule of concerts and exhibitions, as well as plenty of food and wine events throughout.

#### **[Taste Orange @ Bondi](#)**

Wineries, producers, artists and musicians from the Orange region are preparing to descend on Bondi, Sydney for the third annual Taste Orange @ Bondi event taking place from August 24 - 30.

The program is jam packed with breakfasts, lunches and dinners at a number of the well known Bondi eating establishments including Ravesi's, Blue Orange, Swell, Brown Sugar and Icebergs who be showcasing produce and wine from Orange on their menus. There are also Orange wine tastings at the bottle shops in Bondi.

The week will again culminate in Taste Orange Sunday on 30 August at the Bondi Pavilion, featuring up to 40 wine, food, accommodation, golfing and tourism operators. Art and artists will perform on the promenade, while music, cooking demonstrations, a rural history display and children's activities will also be part of the day.

