

Limestone values unearthed

Chris Herden

UNEARTHING VITICULTURE IN the Limestone Coast presents the scientific data and a new understanding behind the Limestone Coast's physical, environmental and climatic assets as a winemaking region.

With funding from the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation's Grassroots program, the Limestone Coast Grape and Wine Council has collated a valuable cache of knowledge and technical data on the viticultural landscape of the Limestone Coast wine zone (a constellation of winemaking districts in the south-east corner of South Australia, accounting for about 20% of the state's vineyard plantings). The document includes a magnified profile of each region's water resources, climatic conditions and the zone's rich bounty of limestone-based clay and sandy loams.

"It's explained why certain areas are delivering really exciting wines and it also shows the areas where we haven't shown enough attention," said Sue Bell,

of the Limestone Coast Grape and Wine Council. "This document celebrates the diversity of our viticultural regions. All the scientific data relevant to each region can now be found in a single place."

The 300-page *Unearthing Viticulture in the Limestone Coast* is not a complete terroir documentation of the region but the first of three stages of a multifaceted project.

"Terroir, for many people, is a philosophy; the circle of soil, nature, appellation and human activity. We need an understanding of the cultural, social, human interaction as well. So the next stage of our project will look at the human history of the Limestone Coast with regards to grapegrowing, and the final part will be the winemaking traditions that tie it all together," Bell said.

The Limestone Coast is an area of about 21,000 square kilometres, which extends south from the Coorong at the Murray River mouth and east to the Glenelg

River. The low-lying region has plentiful underground water complemented by high rainfall, rich fertile soil and a relatively flat topography. The region was underwater for many millions of years. Tonnes of marine crustaceans and shells blanketed the sea floor, cemented together and formed limestone reefs. The free-draining and fertile soils that typically formed when wind-blown organic material accumulated on top of a hard calcareous bedrock (such as crystalline limestone) are the prized asset of the Limestone Coast.

New benchmark

The document was assembled and overseen by viticulture consultant Dr Mardi Longbottom.

Unearthing Viticulture in the Limestone Coast summarises the Limestone Coast's physical characteristics by detailing the landscape features unique to each region. According to Dr Longbottom the document marks the first time such a high level of information has been drawn

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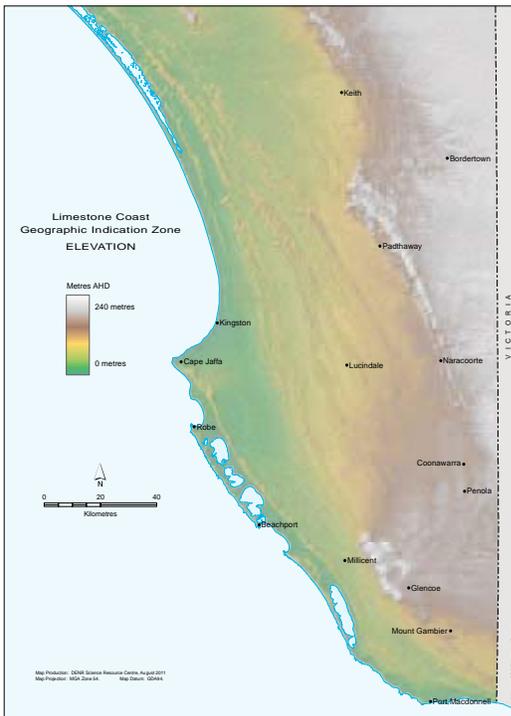
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together in a single repository and made freely accessible to the public.

“I’m not aware of this depth and breadth of Limestone Coast data being presented like this anywhere before,” she said.

“Growers and winemakers can now access climatic data at a regional level or drill down to the specific location of their vineyard blocks and access information about the topography and soils.

“They can draw comparisons with other locations within the Limestone Coast to find parcels of land with similar soil and topographical characteristics and they could (in theory) do comparative tastings to further investigate the regional effects on wine.”

Longbottom says the document will improve understanding of the local wine industry’s impact on the natural resources of the region and will help establish a 2011 benchmark of the Limestone Coast profile.

“The document may also be used to identify new parcels of land that may be suitable for viticulture or, in the situation that old blocks are being pulled out and replanted, making more informed decisions about rootstock choice.”

Unearthing Viticulture in the Limestone Coast was launched at The Limestone Coast Wine Show, in October.

An experienced Limestone Coast winemaker, Bell, from Bellwether Wines, acknowledges the ease with which one can ‘forget the facts and get lost in the story’ of an industry which is increasingly driven by marketing strategies that romanticise or blur the historical facts of winemaking dynasties and localities.

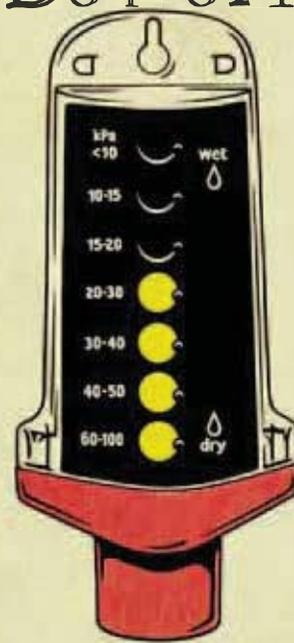
“If we can go back to the facts and build a real story it may help us understand what we should focus on, and why planting in certain places really excels,” she said.

“We see this as only the first step in getting to know the Limestone Coast and a defining moment in understanding the resources we are so lucky to have. We’ll be using this document for years to come. It’s highlighted areas in which to invest some research dollars and where to dedicate time and effort.”

To get a copy of *Unearthing Viticulture in the Limestone Coast* go to website: www.limestonecoastwine.com.au



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