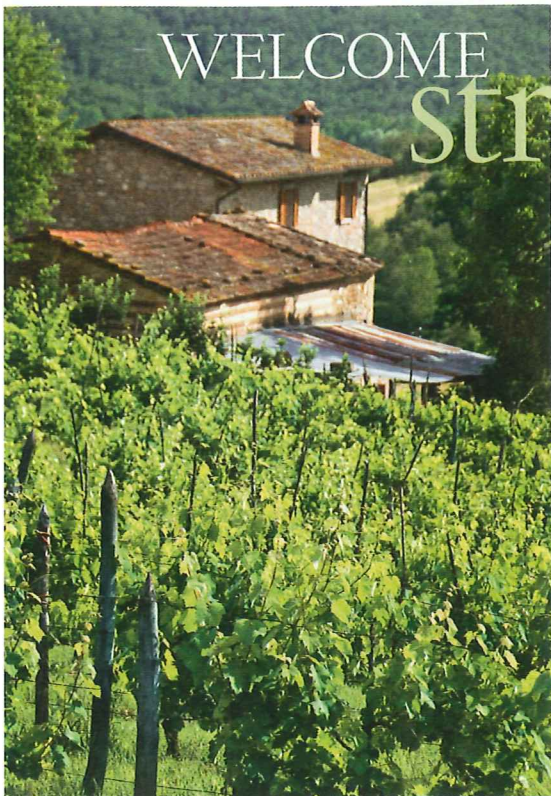


top**tipples**

better**wine**

Flirting with foreign fruit and matching up with Asian



WELCOME stranger

It's no surprise the Aussie wine industry is in a bit of trouble. We're spending less just as the country is producing more vino. It's a long story, but we're not drinking nearly as much as we make. So we should all support our local winemakers. But the joy of wine drinking is the unlimited possible tastes: myriad varieties, districts, years and makers. And there are many more outside this country than in. There's no harm in flirting with a stranger, as long as you come home. Most bottle shops have something from France and Italy, Spain and increasingly from Argentina, Chile and South Africa. Yes, yes we've left out the Kiwis ... they need no introduction.

There are too many labels to fit here, but check overseas grape names to help you compare inexpensive imports with your favourite locals. Albarino is a fragrant white from Spain and Portugal; Garganega produces Italy's lovely Soave. Syrah is shiraz. Nebbiolo, Barbera, Sangiovese (mostly in Chianti) are the red grapes of Italy. Carménère and Malbec give gutsy fruity reds from South America. Tempranillo is an easy-drinking Spanish red. White sparklings include Prosecco from Italy and Cava from Spain.



Spice it up

What wine goes with Asian food? Hold on. Asia is a number of countries, each with several regional cuisines. And there's no tradition of wine with food, as there is in Europe.

It's a tough call, but someone has to try it. Firstly, judge the 'weight' of the food in front of you. Certain dishes, like fresh or lightly-spiced seafood, go well with a delicate riesling. Richer meals, especially chilli fish dishes and spicy chicken or pork stir-fries, call for a fruitier white like a traminer, frontignac or even one of the cheaper chardonnays. Moscato also comes into its own here – it's sweetish, slightly sparkling and lower in alcohol, so you can afford to cool your throat more often.

Duck is rarely over-spiced and so goes well with pinot noir. Big curries, like beef rendang or vindaloo, can be a problem. Some go for the

chilled beer of the country.

Others wheel out a big Aussie shiraz, which stands up well to the heat. One of our favourite newcomers is called Aja. Cleverly designed to sit beautifully beside a wide range of food from our northern neighbours, it comes in a luscious white and now a Blush rosé.



better bottles

Aja Blush, \$20 This lovely moscato-style drop is perfect with most Asian dishes. Its soft sweetness is balanced by natural acidity and a gentle sparkle.

Wirra Wirra Church Block, \$22 One of our all-time favourites. Has lots of juicy red fruit from McLaren Vale. It's generous, velvety and ideal for a better class of barbie.

Brand's Laira Chardonnay, \$21 Coonawarra is red country but it can also produce great whites, like this intense, golden, nutty, mouthfilling beauty.