Australia is proving that its wines have quality and diversity in abundance.

With a land mass of more than 7.5 million sq km, you could fit England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland into Australia 30 times, and still have a bit left over. It’s not surprising therefore that climates and topography are varied. The best wine-producing regions are located on the southern side of the country. The climate of individual regions has the greatest influence on wine style, and so the key to unlocking the potential of Australia’s wines is understanding the geographical distinction of its vineyards. The five most important wine states in Australia are: Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania.

Pierre Mansour
Australia buyer
GREAT GRAPES

Australia successfully grows a range of grapes: cabernet sauvignon, grenache, mourvèdre, and pinot noir in reds; chardonnay, riesling, sauvignon blanc and semillon in whites. But it is perhaps shiraz which deserves the headlines. As Barossa wine producer Peter Lehmann so colourfully said: ‘When God invented shiraz, he did it with Australia in mind.’ Winemakers are not short of imagination Down Under, so there are plenty of exciting and unusual varieties too, from Mediterranean grapes like tempranillo, sangiovese, verdelho and viognier to esoteric Russian grapes like saperavi.

Western Australia

The isolated state of Western Australia is known for its spectacular scenery, golden-sand beaches and giant Karri tree forests. A relatively cool (in Australian terms) Mediterranean climate of warm, breezy summer days and cool nights dominates the wine-producing areas. The resulting wines tend to combine fruit ripeness with freshness – an unusual combination in Australia – which makes the wines particularly appealing.

Margaret River

Elegant, ageworthy cabernet sauvignon originally put the spotlight on Margaret River and is still its trump card. Chardonnay shines here, too, as do the vibrantly fruity, zesty semillon/sauvignon blanc blends.

Great Southern

Including Frankland River, Mount Barker and Pemberton

An extremely isolated and wild area, the Great Southern is 400km from Perth, and has the perfect environment for cool-climate viticulture, creating uniquely regional and distinctive wines. The best wines of the region are riesling (dry, almost austere, with superb definition and purity) and shiraz.

Swan Valley is a short drive north of Perth and offers good-value whites from chenin blanc and verdelho.

South Australia

South Australia (SA) is the heavyweight wine state, producing most of the country’s wine and boasting some of the it’s oldest vines. The dry, hot climate ripens grapes fully, making bold, dense and concentrated wines.

The Barossa Valley has a rich viticultural history with patches of bush-trained vines, many more than 100 years old. It is first and foremost a red wine region. Shiraz is king but cabernet sauvignon, grenache and mourvèdre play an important part, too.

The Eden Valley

A windswept series of elevated hills producing exceptional shiraz and floral riesling.

Clare Valley

Clare Valley represents Australia’s pinnacle for riesling, where elevated vineyards temper the intense heat, producing dry whites of immense class and purity. Reds can be outstanding too, powerful and muscular.
McLaren Vale

McLaren vies with Barossa to be SA’s best red-wine region. The climate is warm enough to guarantee lush, chocolatey reds from shiraz, grenache and cabernet, while its strong maritime influence invests elegance in chardonnay, viognier and marsanne.

Coonawarra

This is South Australia’s leading cabernet region, the unique terra rossa soil producing grapes with intense flavours and fabulous structure.

Langhorne Creek

Langhorne is cooled by the lake and nearby sea and grows grapes of very good quality at a low cost. These excellent-value wines are marked by a softness and fullness of flavour.

Adelaide Hills

These cool hills just east of the city provide the perfect ingredients for lemony sauvignon blanc and chardonnay.

Victoria

Victoria, with the most diverse conditions for vine-growing, is the most varied of Australia’s wine states. Despite having only 30% of the country’s total plantings, Victoria boasts the greatest number of wineries of any state. The result is a colourful collection of wine styles, grape varieties and sub-regions. Below we list a selection, but not all, of the most important.

Yarra Valley

Arguably the state’s best known region is famous for pinot noir and chardonnay. More recently, it has shown great success with shiraz.

Mornington Peninsula

Surrounded by the ocean Mornington Peninsula is cool and so very suited to the slow ripening of pinot and chardonnay. It is home to many of Australia’s most restrained and pure examples.

Geelong

Geelong enjoys a windy, maritime climate but is slightly warmer, making plump pinot and some delicious shiraz and chardonnay.

The Grampians

At the westernmost end of the state, The Grampians lie at 335m altitude and lead the way for cool-climate shiraz (texture and spice, fruity richness).

Rutherglen

In the hot, north-east zone, Rutherglen specialises in fortified dessert wines based on raisined Muscat; aged in old wooden casks, they are extraordinarily rich and sticky.
New South Wales

Australia's first vineyards were planted here in 1788. Today, the state is most famous for the Hunter Valley, where Australia's most delicate, ageworthy white wines are made. Picked early and light in alcohol, Hunter semillon is delicious for its dry, tight structure and lemony fruit which becomes toasty and soft in texture with age. In successful vintages, Hunter shiraz can be outstanding: medium-bodied, earthy and ageworthy.

Tasmania

A place of beautiful landscapes, this quaint island is separated from mainland Australia by the 240km stretch of the Bass Strait, and is a wine lover's and fisherman's dream. Boasting some of the world's finest seafood, its temperate climate makes it Australia's coolest wine-producing region. As would be expected, sparkling wine, riesling and chardonnay thrive in Tasmania, but pinot noir can be exceptional, with a delicacy and lift often lacking in wines from the mainland.