

REVIEW\

# DECANTER\ BEN THOMAS ON TASTINGS FIT FOR A QUEEN

**THE QUEEN'S** Birthday weekend – the last long weekend until November – always throws up a dilemma for me: cram a range of experiences into the three days; or relax and recharge for the half-year ahead. Both of these can easily incorporate a glass of wine, but I generally choose to get out and visit a wine region or two.

This year, no fewer than four wine regions around the state are hosting weekend-long events, so it looks like I'll be racking up the kilometres in the car.

From wine barrel-rolling races down Rutherglen's High Street to Dolce Fa Niente ("the sweetness of doing nothing"), at Politini in the King Valley, region-wide events are great for the grape lover in the family, but there's always more than enough to keep designated drivers and, most importantly, children entertained.

A mate and I took our two-year-olds, Mim and Zef, for an overnight stay at Rutherglen a few weeks ago and were thrilled to find play equipment, toys and colouring books at all the cellar doors we visited, giving us much-needed breathing space to taste and chat through a few wines. One winemaker even let her chooks loose for the kids to chase as we enjoyed a glass with lunch.

Our wives will be pleased to know we did curtail our tastings to supervise the kids, so a good tip for tasting wines with little ones around is not to feel obliged to



(SIMON DALLINGER)

taste all the wines on offer. If reds are your thing, skip the whites and get stuck into the shiraz straight away.

The King Valley and Rutherglen are both fair drives (three hours by car), though they can be done as day trips if you don't have time to hang around.

Closer to home, the Mornington Peninsula is hosting its annual winter wine weekend. Its keynote event is at the Red Hill showgrounds on the Saturday of the Queen's Birthday weekend, with more than 200 wines available for tasting under the one roof.

And there's more to the celebrations than the main event. Leave the showgrounds and head to cellar doors to try back vintages and grab bargains.

I wrote about Heathcote being a favourite region of mine recently, and it looks like there are some interesting tastings over the weekend. Wineries with cellar doors are open each day, but what interests me are the smaller wineries, that have their wines available for tastings at Cellar & Store on the Heathcote main drag.

Heathcote is an hour and 40 minutes' drive from Melbourne and there are a few ways to get there. Go through Lancefield and you'll find yourself at Shelmerdine's cellar door before you make it to town. \ senorthomas@gmail.com

» Hari Raj visits the Grapes of Rutherglen. P34

**Editor's picks**

**Heathcote on Show** \ Highlight: The range of tastings over the weekend at Cellar & Store. Don't miss cellar doors: Shelmerdine, Yabby Lake. » [www.heathcoteonshow.com.au](http://www.heathcoteonshow.com.au)

**Mornington Peninsula Winter Wine Weekend** \ Highlight: Winter Wine Fest at Red Hill showgrounds on June 11. Two hundred wines and their makers under the one roof. Don't miss cellar doors: Eldridge Estate, Paradigm Hill. » [www.mpva.com.au](http://www.mpva.com.au)

**King Valley Weekend Fit For A King** \ Highlight: Tasting prosecco along the new Prosecco Road wine tour. Don't miss cellar doors: Brown Brothers, Pizzini. » [www.winesofthekingvalley.com.au](http://www.winesofthekingvalley.com.au)

**Rutherglen Winery Walkabout** \ Highlight: Back vintages and tasting history in a glass with rare fortifieds. Don't miss cellar doors: All Saints Estate, Scion Vineyard. » [www.winemakers.com.au](http://www.winemakers.com.au)

## taste this

**Crittenden Estate**  
**The Zumma Pinot Noir 2009**  
(Mornington Peninsula) \$49; 13.5% ★★★★★ ½

Winemaker Rollo Crittenden has been on a roll lately, and it continues with this release. Elegant, lifted aromas of light and dark cherry, plum, mineral and loam lead to fresh, vivid flavours of cherry, rhubarb, raspberry and earth. Its structure – a silky texture with acid and tannins in balance – stands in good stead as an ageing prospect and it was better drinking after being opened for a day. It has a persistent finish with layers of sweet and sour flavours.

**Food match** \ Mushroom risotto



**Stonier Chardonnay 2009**  
(Mornington Peninsula) \$25; 13.5% ★★★★★

With aromas of peach, toast, melon and struck match along with generous, fruit-driven stonefruit, grapefruit and honey flavours, this well-made, solid wine will appeal to a broad range of drinkers. It gets the balancing act between bright, chalky acidity and rich flavours just about right, and a creamy texture adds to the wine. It has good length with spice and honey flavours on the finish.

**Food match** \ Grilled scallops



**Rutherglen Estates Savagnin 2010**  
(Region) \$16; 11.5% ★★★★★ ½

This would be a good option for parties or barbecues. It goes well with food and would make wine lovers and people who just want a glass of white happy. Low alcohol is a plus as it's a wine that could easily be guzzled. It is, however, a rather serious wine and a good example of local savagnin. Flavours and aromas of pear, honeysuckle, lemon zest and a hint of tinned pineapple sit well with crisp, slightly chalky acidity and creamy texture.

**Food match** \ Antipasto



**Brown Brothers Limited Release Shiraz 2009**  
(Heathcote) \$29.90; 14.5% ★★★★★ ½

These limited-release wines are a good reason to head to Brown Brothers' cellar door at Milawa. Matured in mostly aged American oak, this is plush and powerful with aromas of blackberry, cherry, spice and cured meat. It's got fresh acid on the palate, fine-grained tannin and medium-bodied flavours of blackberry, pepper, clove and oak sweetness that build and build on the finish. It's a remarkably light and well-balanced wine given the high alcohol.

**Food match** \ Roast lamb



5★ Outstanding 4★ Really good 3★ Good 2★ OK ★ Not worth it

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So you love a bargain?

**Holly's Garden Ramato Pinot Gris 2010** (Whitlands) \$17; 13.5% ★★★★★

The Whitlands Plateau is at the southern end of the King Valley, and these grapes were grown at an altitude of 750 metres. Ramato means copper in Italian and is an old method of production in which the grapes are crushed and left on their skins to gain a copper-like colour, rich texture and crisp acidity. Texture and acidity are structural highlights, as are aromas and flavours of pear, golden delicious apple, red berries, citrus (juice and pith) and a varietal smokiness. I had to double-check the price. **Food match** \ Peking duck

