

## Australia, Hunter Valley

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One of Australia's oldest wine-producing regions, the Hunter Valley has suffered of late. Victim of changing wine tastes and styles, victim of commercialism, victim of coal-mining excesses, victim of earlier M&A activity that stripped some of the historic brands from their roots, the vines and the winemakers persist.

Being on the northern edge of winegrowing in the Southern Hemisphere comes with warm, wet weather, which has always been the region's greatest challenge. Tropical depressions swoop through with alarming regularity, keeping disease pressure high. It's the reason why the historic styles of Hunter Valley Semillon and Shiraz developed, as they were picked early, before too much damaging rain could hit.

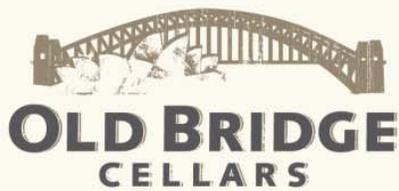
The lean style of Semillon, almost always under 12% alcohol (and more often 10.5% or 11%), and correspondingly high acidity makes the wines difficult when young. They're great as cold, refreshing drinks or alongside raw oysters, but not much else.

It's only with sufficient bottle age that these wines begin to impress. In time, they develop honeyed, toasty and sometimes marmalade characters that add layers of complexity and flesh to the skeletal acidity, seeming to broaden out on the palate and become more generous, while still retaining the acids that keep them vibrant and lively. Generally, the transition occurs somewhere between five and ten years after the vintage.

It's a similar situation with regard to Hunter Valley Shiraz, which tends to be more medium-bodied and less fruit-driven (and hence, overlooked) than versions from farther south. In the past, the tannins of these earlier-picked wines tended to be a bit tough, a bit chewy, making them hard to warm up to.

While aging is again key to getting the most out of these wines, better viticulture and winemaking have made these wines more appealing. The 2014 vintage, which brought a warm, rain-free harvest, is an ideal year in which to start an exploration of these potentially outstanding wines.

While most of these reviews are based on samples submitted to the Wine Advocate, some of them (particularly the older Semillons) were tasted at a masterclass on aging Semillon that was presented by several of the producers in New York City. Thanks to Chris Tyrrell, Mike De Iuliis and Jeff Byrne for making the trip and to Chuck Hayward for moderating the discussion.



## BROKENWOOD

### **95+ pts Brokenwood Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz 2014**

From a great site and a great vintage, the 2014 Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz is an exemplar for Shiraz from the Hunter Valley. It's as structured as ever but with more depth than usual and an extra layer of generosity. Black cherry fruit is framed by acids and subtle notes of French oak (think pencil shavings and vanilla), showing terrific persistence on the finish, where the tannins are plentiful yet fine grained. It's not unapproachable now but expect it to age gracefully for two decades or more.

### **94 pts Brokenwood Brycefield-Belford Vineyard Semillon 2005**

Still fresh and vibrant, the 2005 Brycefield-Belford Vineyards Semillon is a towering example of Hunter Valley Sémillon. It's got those great evolved aromas of beeswax on the nose, followed by zesty lemon-lime fruit and a long, lingering finish. Drink now or hold (but why?).

### **93 pts Brokenwood ILR Semillon 2011**

The 2011 ILR Reserve Semillon is just beginning to show some signs of maturity. Scents of paraffin and clover blossoms are pushing closer to beeswax and honey, while the flavors are stuck somewhere between wax beans, lime and more mature notes of orange marmalade. It's medium-bodied and silky in texture, broadening out from where it must have started its aging curve. Give it another couple of years in the cellar and drink it over the next decade or more.

### **93 pts Brokenwood Verona Vineyard Shiraz 2014**

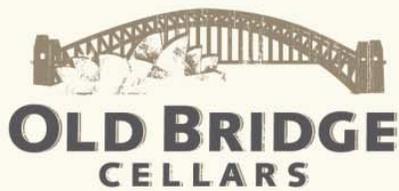
From a vintage that turned out especially strong in the Hunter Valley, the 2014 Shiraz Verona Vineyard is a top-notch effort. The nose exudes exciting scents of blackberries, dark chocolate, dried spices and cedar. This is more full-bodied and generous than is typical for Hunter Valley Shiraz, with ripe, plummy fruit, dark chocolate and licorice notes framed by supple tannins. Finally, the berries, spice and vanilla notes come to a long, elegant finish. After this, I'm really looking forward to trying more of the Hunter Valley 2014 reds.

### **92+ pts Brokenwood Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz 2013**

A standard-bearer for the Hunter Valley, the Brokenwood 2013 Shiraz Graveyard Vineyard is inky in color and somewhat reticent at first on the nose. Given some time in the glass, it shows classy notes of pencil shavings, dried spices, bold boysenberry fruit and more than a touch of licorice. Concentrated and intense, the medium-bodied yet powerful wine clearly needs additional bottle age to fully express its potential.

### **92+ pts Brokenwood ILR Semillon 2009**

Even at eight years of age, the 2009 Semillon ILR Reserve retains a hint of green to its pale straw hue. Youthful lime-inflected aromas have a grassy element as well, similar to fresh coconut husk. This is tight, acid-driven and concentrated on the palate, with great verve and length on the tart, nearly mouth-puckering finish. In short, this is all you expect in a great age-worthy Hunter Sémillon. Drink it now with oysters or clams on the half shell or put it away for at least a few more years. Tasted twice, with consistent notes.



**92 pts Brokenwood Oakey Creek Semillon 2013**

It's still early days for the 2013 Oakey Creek Vineyard Semillon, which still shows a touch of green to its light straw color. It smells like the crushed stones you might have dumped to form a garden path merged with faint whiffs of sea spray and citrus. This light-bodied wine can be drunk now as a mouthwatering aperitif or with raw shellfish, but my preference would be to cellar it for another 5 years to let it develop additional richness and complexity.

**91 pts Brokenwood Oakey Creek Semillon 2009**

The 2009 Oakey Creek Vineyard Semillon seems to be evolving faster than the 2009 ILR Reserve. It shows touches of nut skin and citrus marmalade notes that presage full maturity. It's got vibrant acids to go along with its medium body and a long, tart, mouthwatering finish.

**89 pts Brokenwood Hunter Valley Semillon 2014**

The 2014 Semillon is a fine, quickly maturing example of this Hunter Valley staple. Scents of crushed stone and lemon zest emerge from the glass, followed by a light to medium body and a crisp acidity. Hints of stone fruit strike a riper note than is typical, suggesting early maturity.

**88 pts Brokenwood Hunter Valley Semillon 2015**

A bit like a dry gin and tonic, the 2015 Semillon would be a great refresher on a hot summer day. Lemon and lime notes carry the suggestion of brininess and a hint of crushed stones lingers on the finish.

