



## Textured tale

### A stellar range of Victorian wines worth fussing over

**Y**ou live and you learn. My first taste of Crawford River's riesling was a disappointment: too much texture and not enough classic riesling lime-curd and blossom. I wondered what the fuss was about. Today, I wonder why there's not more fuss.

As a producer with two heart-stopping rieslings, a stellar cabernet rosé, two very good reds and an alluring sweet wine, Crawford River is obviously doing things properly. Also, over time, I've learned that texture is perhaps the most beguiling facet of wine; far more so than plump fruit, showy oak, youthful perfume or expected qualities, such as lime-curd and blossom.

The Crawford River folk talk about their soil, a bed of ancient lime topped by permeable clay,

which is covered by basalt loam, in Victoria's west. It is an important part of the Crawford River picture, along with climate, vineyard management, philosophy and, of course, vine age.

The original vines were planted in 1975, with two further plantings in the early 1990s and in 2000. If you've wondered how much vine age affects wine quality, the answer lies, quite clearly, in the two rieslings produced at Crawford River.

The Young Vines Riesling (currently 2012) comes from vines planted in 2000, so at 14 years of age they are probably more truthfully middle-aged. But the moniker is left over from the early years and the decision to separate the new and old plantings. Aromatically the Young Vines shows quite a difference: some slightly oily

bottle-age characters with only a vestige of the bright, citrusy notes that must have predominated a year or so ago. But the palate is gregariously fresh with lively, zesty acidity and a sort of mid-palate succulence that I find intriguing and utterly delicious. This is superb riesling with plenty of time ahead of it.

The 2012 from the 1975 plantings is as similar as you'd expect it to be, but it has much more floral and lime on the nose; it seems more youthful.

If the Young Vines was textural and succulent, this is more so, with layers of texture and a length that sort of unfolds. Again it's all kept in line by very bright, tangy acid and a wee bit of grip.

Most of the Crawford River vineyard is taken up with riesling or cabernet sauvignon, with cabernet franc, merlot, sauvignon blanc and semillon comprising the remainder.

The cabernet sauvignon from the later plantings is used to produce a rosé that is dry, savoury and, once again, textural.

But the old-vine stuff is destined for something much more exciting: Crawford River Cabernet Sauvignon. The current release is from 2006 and it is a perfect example of cool-climate Australian cabernet at its best. It has a lick of that leafy, grassy edge that hallmarks cabernet in its happy zone. Underneath is an elegant, but quite dense abundance of dark-berried fruit and cedar. At eight years of age it is just coming into its sweet spot, showing some undergrowthy bottle age, but it has one, maybe two decades of life to go.

There's more to the range, including a nicely maturing 2010 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc, a cabernet merlot that sits a notch below the cabernet sauvignon and an eerily sauternes-like sweet wine called Nektar. They are a stellar bunch of wines. Whether the riesling or the cabernet is the Crawford River flagship depends on whether you prefer white or red. Either way, Crawford River is an Australian classic.