

Despite the volume of wine exports for 2009/2010 increasing by 3.3 per cent over the previous year to 775 million litres (the second-highest on record), there are still worrying signs for the industry. Domestic oversupply, continuing tough economic conditions in major export markets and the strength of the Aussie dollar still dog the business of winemaking.

For the seventh consecutive year, and driven by a growth in bulk exports (with oversupplies being cleared below \$1 per litre), the average price-per-litre of Australian exported wine declined to a record low \$2.80 – a drop of just over 25 per cent over the past two years alone and a massive 40 per cent since the heady days of the early 2000s.

And in an about-face for the 1996 Australian Wine Federation's Strategy 2025, which revolved around rapid vineyard expansion to accelerate wine exports (this was re-evaluated in 2007), there is now a realisation that the future of Australia's wine industry "rests on its ability to promote its fine wine credentials to the world", as James Halliday noted.

Wine Australia's Australian Landmark Tutorial, where some \$40,000 worth of current and historically important wines were opened for 13 mainly international trade and media identities, and Australia's First Families of Wine (created by 12 family-owned wineries) are examples of the industry promoting Australia's rich history and entrepreneurial winemaking spirit. Interestingly, and maybe paradoxically, our largest wine companies – those often blamed for producing the volume brands that have trashed our reputation abroad – are making some terrific wines, *despite the uncertainty that surrounds their future.*

Foster's, which is planning a demerger of its wine and beer business, with the wine division renamed Treasury Wine Estates, has written off \$2 billion worth of wine assets over the past two years. Having spent more than \$6 billion to acquire these assets, it will be lucky to sell Treasury Wines for half that. And Constellation Wines Australia, our largest producer, has around \$25 million of assets it is still trying to sell.

Five of this year's Top 20, however, come from these two companies. They include Hardy's benchmark 1998 Arras E.J. Carr Late Disgorged sparkling, Leo Buring's textbook Leonay DW17 Clare Valley Riesling 2005 and Penfold's stunning, restrained and ultra cool-climate Tumberumba Chardonnay Bin 311 2009. Indeed, the best Australian chardonnays are thoroughly world class – something the industry should be proud of. There are four chardonnays this year, from NSW, Victoria and South Australia. My apologies to those producers who narrowly missed the cut: among them, Hardy's (Eileen Hardy), Shaw + Smith, Voyager, Bindi, Leeuwin Estate, Pierro, Giant Steps, Kooyong and Yabby Lake.

As usual, this year's selection features a number of wines from what were great years for their respective regions, including Vasse Felix Heytesbury Cabernet 2007 (Margaret River), Clonakilla Shiraz Viognier 2009 (Canberra District), Ata Rangi Pinot Noir 2008 (Martinborough, NZ), Leo Buring Riesling 2005 (Eden Valley), Fontodi Chianti Classico 2006 (Tuscany), Chiara Boschis Barolo Cannubi 2006 (Piedmont), and Donnhoff Dry Riesling 2009 (Germany).

Finally, it's great to see two Aussie classics in Chateau Tahbilk and Jasper Hill in such good form, while Jamsheed's Garden Gully Shiraz 2009 (Great Western) and the Andrew Thomas Shiraz (Hunter Valley) represent an exciting new wave of Australian producers set to make their mark.

top20{2010}

The export performance for price-per-litre is a disappointing one but winemaking standards across the industry are nothing short of stellar