

THE FRUIT

When I planted the initial six acres of merlot on my Hillcot vineyard in 1982, it was the first commercial planting of this premium red variety in the Barossa. When I first produced a straight merlot wine, there were only two others available on the Australian market. The fruit from these now 20-year-old vines is intensely concentrated, yet soft, as we have come to expect of premium Merlot. 2002 was a very good vintage providing excellent quantities of high quality fruit. For this wine the grapes were harvested at optimum ripeness at about 13.5° Baumé.

THE WINEMAKING

The fruit was crushed into static fermenters and fermented on skins for six-to-seven days to extract ample colour and flavour. A complete rack and return took place once a day to gain more colour and flavour from the gentle pressing action of the skins as the juice drained out. About 80% of the juice finished fermentation in oak, before being matured in American oak puncheons for a total of 16 months. Barrel fermentation accentuates the softness of this wine while adding complexity and structure. A small portion, about 10%, of cabernet sauvignon is also built into this wine to tighten the mid and end palate, and create extra complexity.

(2 0 0 2 Hillcot MERLOT)

The Grant Burge 2002 Hillcot Merlot shows mainly dark purple hues with crimson tones at the rim. The nose is highly concentrated with ripe raspberry the predominant character, and subtle American oak nuances in a supporting role. The raspberry-like fruit flows through to the palate of this medium-bodied wine. It is soft and approachable but with excellent richness and concentration, and a long smooth finish. Oak tannins provide extra complexity on the palate. A bigger wine than in past years this vintage is ready to enjoy now or over the next eight years with lighter meat dishes, pasta or Mediterranean cuisine.

