



**Written by**  
Jancis Robinson  
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## A Margaret River assortment



*See also Cape Mentelle International Cabernet Tasting 2017 and Triumph for Margaret River Chardonnay.*

The few days Nick and I spent in Margaret River in November 2017 were a real trip down Memory Lane for us. We hadn't been there together since 1988 when we had fallen in love with its combination of rocky coastline, surf, ancient karri forests and promising vineyards. I was rather expecting things to have changed dramatically for the worse but was heartened by how relatively little Nature had been encroached upon. The natural beauty remained intact, as you can see from this picture of the Margaret River flowing into the Indian Ocean, but had merely been punctuated by very many more wineries.

The restaurant scene was considerably improved, with wineries such as Cullen, Voyager and Vasse Felix offering serious lunchtime dining options, leaving evening hours largely to

restaurants in the manageable township of Margaret River itself. The best place to eat in the evening in Margaret River is probably the popular small Japanese place Miki's Open Kitchen and the beachside restaurant we liked best was (Kate) Lamont's at the surfing heaven that is Smiths Beach.

Most of my wine-tasting time was taken up with the tastings that celebrated 50 years of Margs, the Cape Mentelle International Cabernet Tasting and the Cullen Wines International Chardonnay Tasting. However, whenever I had a tiny gap in the busy schedule decreed by the organisers of the Gourmet Escape food and drink extravaganza, I seemed to find myself tasting wine.

Below are 44 tasting notes taken at visits to three of the region's more important wineries, supplemented by a small assortment of wines tasted elsewhere. Most of these encounters were, alas, relatively brief, but sufficient to give a good idea of progress.

### **FRASER GALLOP**

Entrepreneur Nigel Gallop is a major force in Margaret River. He hosted the massive opening party for Gourmet Escape in the grounds of his neo-Palladian villa, so extensive that we all had to be shuttled there from the car parks. The 20-ha estate is located on the highest point in the Wilyabrup subregion (I heard surprisingly little discussion of subregions during my recent visit, perhaps because harmony was the prime aim of these half-century celebrations). This means that, although Fraser Gallop is 7 km (4 m) from the coast, its elevation means it is affected by many an ocean breeze. All vines here are dry-grown. The dominant variety is Cabernet Sauvignon, grown on 9 ha (22 acres), supplemented by other red Bordeaux varieties and 7 ha of Chardonnay.

The extremely dedicated winemaker is Clive Otto, who moved here from Vasse Felix in 2006 (see [Vasse Felix goes historical](#)). He revels in using different sorts of barrel - seven in all, many on rollers for ease of access - for each of the wines he makes. He sells barrels as well as making wine so, as he puts it with a smile, 'I know what everyone else is doing'. He did the 2009 vintage at Domaine de Chevalier and the 2014 one at Pichon Baron and was particularly interesting (to wine students anyway) on comparisons between what is done at this Pauillac Supersecond and what he does for his Parterre Cabernet. Pichon Baron crushes fruit whereas Parterre is whole bunch. At Pichon they start fermentation straightaway but for Parterre he imposes a four-day cold soak. At Pichon, inoculation encourages malolactic conversion at much the same time as alcoholic fermentation whereas it takes place afterwards for Parterre. The Pichon fermentation is a bit warmer than Parterre's and Pichon is pressed sequentially to barrel so all barrels are different whereas Parterre's identical barrels are filled from one big tank. Pichon spends 12 months in oak, Parterre 18.

He sees himself as a Cabernet specialist and claims that the new policy of producing three levels of Cab - Estate, Parterre and a new top-of-the-range Palladian - was inspired by the strict selection at Pichon. But note from my tasting notes that the most basic level, Estate, is made in very much smaller quantity than the Parterre.

- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc 2010 Margaret River *Second vintage. 60% new oak.*  
Bright gold. Mellow and lightly pungent, slightly sweet. Very charming. Still going strong. Long. Rich at first and then super-tangy. Chewy end. Drink 2015-2023  
17
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc 2013 Margaret River *Usually about 70%*

*Sémillon.*

Sweet start and very mellow. Lots of acidity. Tight but spicy and satisfying. Throbs a bit. Drink 2017-2023

17

- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc 2016 Margaret River *Their least profitable wine in view of the oak use. They persist because Margaret River needs to be known for this style.*  
Mid gold. Lightly floral. I could almost take this for a Grosses Gewächs Riesling! Great composition. Lovely already. Drink 2017-2025  
AU\$30 RRP 17.5
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Chardonnay 2006 Margaret River *Finished, not made, by Clive. Made at Bruce Duke's contract facility. They used lots of (70%) new oak.*  
Big, round and sweet. Sweet and far from the most refreshing. Bit astringent on the end. Drink 2009-2016  
16
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Chardonnay 2011 Margaret River *Now 30% new oak, picking earlier and wild fermentation. 50% large-format oak, backing off on toast. Not much malo for any of Clive Otto's whites. They're not big on lees stirring.*  
Light quinine finish. Lots of acidity. Drink 2016-2022  
16.5
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Chardonnay 2013 Margaret River *Butterscotch nose and then lovely tightness and freshness. Green vegy and tightens up on the finish. Salty finish. Long and fresh.* Drink 2017-2023  
17
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Chardonnay 2016 Margaret River *Floral and bright. Big and round. Bony and explosive. Worth comparing it with a burgundy grand cru? I also tasted it at the '50 years of Margaret River' tasting where it looked very good too.* Drink 2018-2025  
17.5
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Cabernet Sauvignon 2008 Margaret River *85% Cabernet Sauvignon plus Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Some left on skins for as long as 40 days.*  
Very dark crimson. Nicely developed. Lots of fruit sweetness in youth and then dry finish. Crisp and brisk. Real energy here. Drink 2012-2020  
17
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 Margaret River *Round but not as fresh as the 2008. Round and deep. Drying tannins on the end. A little jagged at the moment.* Drink 2017-2027  
16.5
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 Margaret River *A warmer vintage than 2014 and a smaller crop.*  
Deep crimson. Nice subtle nose with a hint of iodine. Racy and lifted. Lovely blend of ripe fruit and dry tannins. Drink 2018-2028  
17.5
- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Cabernet Sauvignon 2014 Margaret River *Less concentrated than the 2013. Round and fruity. A bit inky. Pretty dry end. Not very graceful at the moment. Needs time.* Drink 2020-2030  
16.5+
- Fraser Gallop Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 Margaret River *First vintage of a new line, less expensive than Parterre and modeled on techniques Clive Otto observed when working the 2014 vintage at Ch Pichon Baron. Vines planted 1998 and 1999. 160 cases.*  
Quite green Cabernet fruit picked in mid March. Then sweet and round and fresh on the

palate. Mid intensity. Drink 2017-2021

AU\$30 RRP 16

- Fraser Gallop, Parterre Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 Margaret River *To be released in 2018. 2,300 cases.*

Looks a little more mature at the rim than the Estate 2015. Intense and glossy. Riper. But fresh and vibrant on the end. Drink 2017-2026

AU\$45 RRP 17

- Fraser Gallop, Palladian Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 Margaret River *100% new oak. 160 cases. Released in November 2017 because of demand - crazy in terms of the wine's readiness, in my view.*

Subtle, layered, deep ruby. Tight and youthful and shows what Clive Otto can do. Drink 2020-2030

AU\$110 RRP 17+

[potential] **Palladian Chardonnay 2017 Margaret River** 18 Drink 2019-27

This will be the debut vintage *if* they decide to make it. 100% 500-litre puncheons. Will be bottled in three weeks. Big and rich and gorgeous with masses of acidity. Exotically floral.

## CULLEN

Vanya Cullen nabbed me just before the International Chardonnay Tasting at Cullen to taste my way through her current range. She has been a real pioneer of organic and then biodynamic viticulture in Western Australia. Fermentations have been entirely spontaneous since 2006 (1996 for Chardonnay). The nomenclature of some of her newer bottlings acknowledge the influence of the stars. I like the way she continues to experiment. She was one of the first mainstream wine producers of my acquaintance to make an orange wine. See the second of these wines of the week.

- Cullen, Mangan Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2017 Margaret River *Planted 1995-1997. Overnight skin contact.*  
Really quite rich nose - Sancerre plus grassiness. Bone-dry end and very chewy. Drink 2018-2021  
16.5
- Cullen, Cullen Vineyard Moon Opposite Saturn Harvest Sauvignon Blanc 2017 Margaret River *Planted 1996. More minerally, usually, than Mangan Vineyard so they use a bit more oak.*  
Floral nose. Then dry and wet stony on the end. Absolutely bone dry. Drink 2019-2021  
17
- Cullen, Mangan Vineyard Moon Opposite Saturn Harvest Field Blend 2017 Margaret River *Contains some Verdelho. A little sharp and tart at the moment.* Drink 2018-2022  
16.5+
- Cullen, Mangan Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2017 Margaret River *57% Sauvignon Blanc, 38% Sémillon, 5% Verdelho. 12% fermented in barrels, of which 45% were new. Cullen bought Mangan in 2016 from Vanya's brother Rick. Certified biodynamic.*  
Concentrated nose. Gloriously broad and complete. Drink 2017-2021  
17.5
- Cullen, Cullen Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2010 Margaret River *Served from magnum with the first course of local produce immediately after the Cullen International Chardonnay Tasting.*  
Pale straw - looks very youthful. But it tastes fully mature with the acidity very definitely descendant. Some old beeswax character. Decidedly mellow. Drink 2012-2017

16

- Cullen, Dancing in the Sun 2017 Margaret River *Entry-level blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon and Verdelho. RS 3-4 g/l.*

Floral nose and not as dry as the other Cullen whites. Easy but without much persistence. Drink 2017-2018

15.5

- Cullen, Kevin John Chardonnay 2016 Margaret River *To be released on what would have been Kevin John Cullen's 95th birthday, 22 November 2017. 30% aged in oak, the rest in amphora. Some whole bunch.*

Very intense nose though for the moment not that persistent. Classic, salty, grapefruit-juice nose. Extremely fresh, lively and crisp but by no means anorexic. Chalky finish. Very appetising. Drink 2017-2025

17.5

- Cullen, Amber 2017 Margaret River *100% Sauvignon Blance. (Amber 2016, 100% Sémillon, is not yet ready.)*

Very pale amber colour. Vegy, almost cabbagey, on the nose and not obviously a skin-contact wine yet. Drink 2019-2022

15.5+

- Cullen, Amber 2014 Margaret River *Sémillon plus Sauvignon Blanc.*

Deep amber colour. Broad fan of flavours. Still looking lovely: nutty with astringency in place of acidity. This was a very good choice as a wine of the week! Drink 2015-2018

17

- Cullen, Dancing in the Moonlight Rosé 2017 Margaret River *37% Merlot, 27% Malbec, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon and 9% Petit Verdot.*

Pale rose colour. Off dry and lively with classy, non-facile fruit. A little something to chew on the end. 13.6% Drink 2017-2018

16.5

- Cullen, Mangan Vineyard Merlot/Malbec/Petit Verdot 2016 Margaret River *Entry level. Sappy, fresh with slightly pinched tannins. Drying finish.* Drink 2018-2022

16

- Cullen, Mangan East Block 2016 Margaret River *51% Petit Verdot, 49% Malbec.* Bright fruit with a very dry finish. Drink 2018-2024

16+

- Cullen Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot 2016 Margaret River *Very warm and friendly. Beautifully balanced with admirable freshness. Very bright fruit. The perfect wine to come home to.* Drink 2017-2028

17

- Cullen, Diana Madeline Cabernet Sauvignon 2016 Margaret River *Spicy, intense with a polished texture and some balsam notes. Not nearly ready. Put it away!* Drink 2022-2038

18

- Cullen, Vanya Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 Margaret River *From the best selection of Cabernet, picked at full moon, all aged three months in amphora. They may make amphorae from their own clay. Just 140 dozen of this vintage made. 2012 was the debut vintage.*

Focused and polished and very sleek. Lovely texture - not pinched. Drink 2017-2027

17

- Cullen, Diana Madeline Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 Margaret River *Magnum. Sumptuous nose. Very heady yet not overdone. This is all about texture and subtle nuance - cashmere tannins? - rather than fruit. Very mellow, sweet and round.* Drink 2011-2025

18

- Cullen Cabernet Sauvignon 1978 Margaret River *From a bottle that had been opened and*

*almost drained 24 hours earlier!*

Rich and ripe but still fresh with a certain earthiness. A very good bottle, according to Vanya.Drink 1988-2020

18

- Cullen, Late Harvest Chenin Blanc 2017 Margaret River Planted 1976! Sweet apple juice. Clean and fresh. Serve with apple tart. Naturally stopped fermenting at this medium level of sweetness. More than a hint of the Loire.8% Drink 2017-2018

16

## LEEWIN ESTATE

I enjoyed another speed tasting with Leeuwin founder Denis Horgan and his head winemaker Tim Lovett in their splendid barrel hall while their extensive grounds played host to the thousands of participants in the Gourmet Escape food and drink extravaganza – the same grounds that have played host to an amazing array of international stars and orchestras since Horgan daringly invited the London Philharmonic to play here in 1985, seriously putting Margaret River on the map. Under the aegis of the particularly dynamic duo, winemaker Bob Cartwright and viticulturist John Brocksopp, Leeuwin's Art Series Chardonnay established itself as one of Australia's superstars early on and is still based on the original block. In the tasting described below, I was particularly impressed by the wines labelled Shiraz. From my perspective, I think these very fine wines should be labelled Syrah, to signal just how different they are from typical South Australian Shiraz.

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Chardonnay 2013 Margaret River 36% wild yeast (which started in 2012).

Delicate lively texture with some burgundian notes. Not forced and a little salty grapefruit à la Margaret River. Result of picking on pear and cut lime and white nectarine apparently. Tim Lovett: 'I don't want to have too much winemaking artefact over it.' Clean and lively. See also tasting note from the Cullen International Chardonnay tasting.Drink 2017-2024

17+

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Chardonnay 2010 Margaret River No wild yeast. Greenish gold. Sweeter nose than the 2013. Masses of fruit and life. Green fruit flavours with sufficient acidity. Round but still the lovely satin texture. Chalky finish and very appetising.Drink 2015-2022

17

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Chardonnay 2006 Margaret River Last vintage with any malolactic conversion.

Deep greenish gold. Mellow and ready on the nose. Vegy undertow. Still in good shape with good fruit/acid balance. More informed by the (exceptionally cool) vintage than the vineyard apparently. Hint of menthol. Dry end.Drink 2010-2021

17

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Chardonnay 1987 Margaret River Poured immediately. Long ago decanted into a screwcapped bottle!

Very deep greenish gold. Glucose, 'pleasant' character though a little formless by now. I probably tasted this when I came in 1988. Dry finish. Just a little sweet and lacking punch – not surprisingly for the age!Drink 1991-2001

16.5

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 Margaret River Contains 5% Malbec and sees 24 months in oak.

Luscious cassis notes. Still young with excellent balance. Very racy and appealing.13.5% Drink

2016-2022

17

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 Margaret River Deep crimson. Round, ripe nose and lots of sinew on the palate. Still quite youthful. Very dry and bordelais in structure. Appetising but not quite ready. Drink 2019-2032

17.5++

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 Margaret River Very dark blackish crimson. Sumptuous nose of great ripeness but no sweetness. Definite cassis but also herbs and balsam. Really refined and complete. Drink 2017-2030

18

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 Margaret River Blackish garnet. Lifted cassis and tarry nose but not sweet and concentrated. Dry finish and very delicate. Dry and racy. Sappy. So clean and fresh. Really rather beautiful and very different from powerful wines of the 1990s. Drink 2012-2030

17.5

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Shiraz 2014 Margaret River Complex and tarry with very firm tannins. Still a baby but it's very easy to see a relation with the northern Rhône. Indeed winemaker Tim Lovett assures me it's a homage to the Rhône. Really dense but with the sleek texture and energy of a serious northern Rhône Syrah. I think in many ways this should be labelled Syrah not Shiraz. It certainly has nothing to do with most Australian Shiraz. Drink 2019-2029

18

- Leeuwin Estate, Art Series Shiraz 2010 Margaret River Blackish crimson. Real concentrated northern Rhône nose. Luscious fruit that's also bone dry while managing to be gorgeous. Glorious and glamorous, with a ripe start. This variety clearly has a brilliant future at Leeuwin. Drink 2017-2028

17.5

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Xanadu, Reserve Chardonnay 2015 Margaret River *All Gin Gin clone. Whole-bunch pressed. 35% new oak. Nine months' ageing. No malo.*

Certainly not opulent; there is (just) enough fruit and a slight bitterness on the finish but it's a worthy example of Margaret River delicacy and light grapefruit raciness. Drink 2017-2021

17

- Voyager, Tom Price Chardonnay 2014 Margaret River *Debut vintage of this top wine. Named after the mining engineer who enabled the family who founded this Cape Dutch winery to extract the iron ore they located in northern Western Australia.*

Very dry and crisp with real delicacy and a chalky finish – though very determinedly not 'big'. Satisfying. Drink 2017-2020

16.5

- Cape Mentelle, Wallcliffe Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon 2012 Margaret River This had lasted exceptionally well. Mineral and lanolin notes on the nose with some green leafiness too. No hurry to drink this gem with excellent fruit in the middle. Drink 2016-2020

17

- Cape Naturaliste Syrah 2014 Margaret River *From Bruce Dukes. Contains 2% Malbec and 3% Viognier. Aged in old French oak sur lie for 10 months in a mix of 228-litre and 500-litre casks.* Fine, fresh, much more (lightish) northern Rhône than Barossa. Appetising current drinking. Drink 2016-2019

16.5

- Voyager Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot 2012 Margaret River Just 6% Merlot (and 3% Petit Verdot) from a relatively cool, wet vintage. 50% new oak and 20 months' ageing. Hint of bay leaf and only just ripe enough, verging on austere. But it did open out much more in the glass. 13.5% Drink 2017-2020

16