



GRETEL SNEATH

A RANGE of factors can lead to the establishment of a wine region, and scientific evidence often produces greater odds in the viticulture lottery. While Padthaway farmers had known it for generations, it was the CSIRO that first officially documented the potential of the district - a report produced in 1944 described the landscape about 50km north-west of Naracoorte as a "first class" site for garden soils. The ocean may be an hour's drive away, but the unique terroir of brown sandy loam over red-brown clay over limestone can be traced back millions of years to when the Naracoorte Range was an ancient coastal dune.

"It's the highest point between here and Antarctica, and some days when you stand there in a breeze during winter, it feels like it," says winemaker Sue Bell, who spent nine years at Padthaway winery Stonehaven. "And I think the fact that it's so flat between here and the coast means that we still get coastal fogs here, so it's actually still a maritime climate."

Combine these factors with a sustainable water source (Padthaway is the Potawuruj Aboriginal word for "good

water") and it's not surprising that the big wine corporates caught wind of the area's potential, planting the first grapes in the district in 1964. "It was serious investment; lots of research, equipment, innovation and knowledge was invested in Padthaway," Bell says.

Seppelt was the first to arrive, planting the classic varieties shiraz, cabernet sauvignon and Rhine riesling at 20ha per year on its 180ha property. The first shiraz was picked in 1968, and vineyard director Karl Seppelt declared: "This is some of the best we've made...the climate is warmer than Coonawarra and the style of wine is softer. I'll be very surprised if this is not a major wine area in a few years".

In 1968, Thomas Hardy became the district's second major player and that same year Lindemans planted the first vineyards north of the Keppoch Hall. Max Arney, who was the Lindemans Padthaway vineyard manager from 1981-84, says the site was chosen for its red brown Terra Rossa soil over limestone.

"Some of the soils were pretty shallow and the ripping didn't always get through that calcrete layer of limestone, so we actually ended up v-furrowing the rows to put most of the topsoil under the

vines," he said. "Chardonnay had taken the country by storm at this stage and we saw in Lindemans Padthaway the opportunity to develop large areas of chardonnay in those early years. It was already the largest single vineyard in Australia and we believe the southern hemisphere, and many trophies came out of the early 1980s for Lindemans Padthaway Chardonnay. It also went in as blending material for bulk wines; Bin 65 was comprised partly of Padthaway fruit and partly of Riverland fruit, and was the biggest selling white wine in the world."

The growing conditions of many Padthaway vineyards were maximised with a unique T-Trellis that splits the canopy crossways, using a wire on either side of the post. The system enables good airflow through the canopy and allows sunshine to penetrate a more even fruit zone without over-exposure, leading to greater quality and consistency. The switch to machine pruning led to an increase in vine height, while changes in watering methods from flood irrigation to traveling and later drip irrigators further boosted fruit quality, with water usage dropping from around 5-6 megalitres per hectare to 1-2ML/ha.

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