

CHALMERS



THE STORY



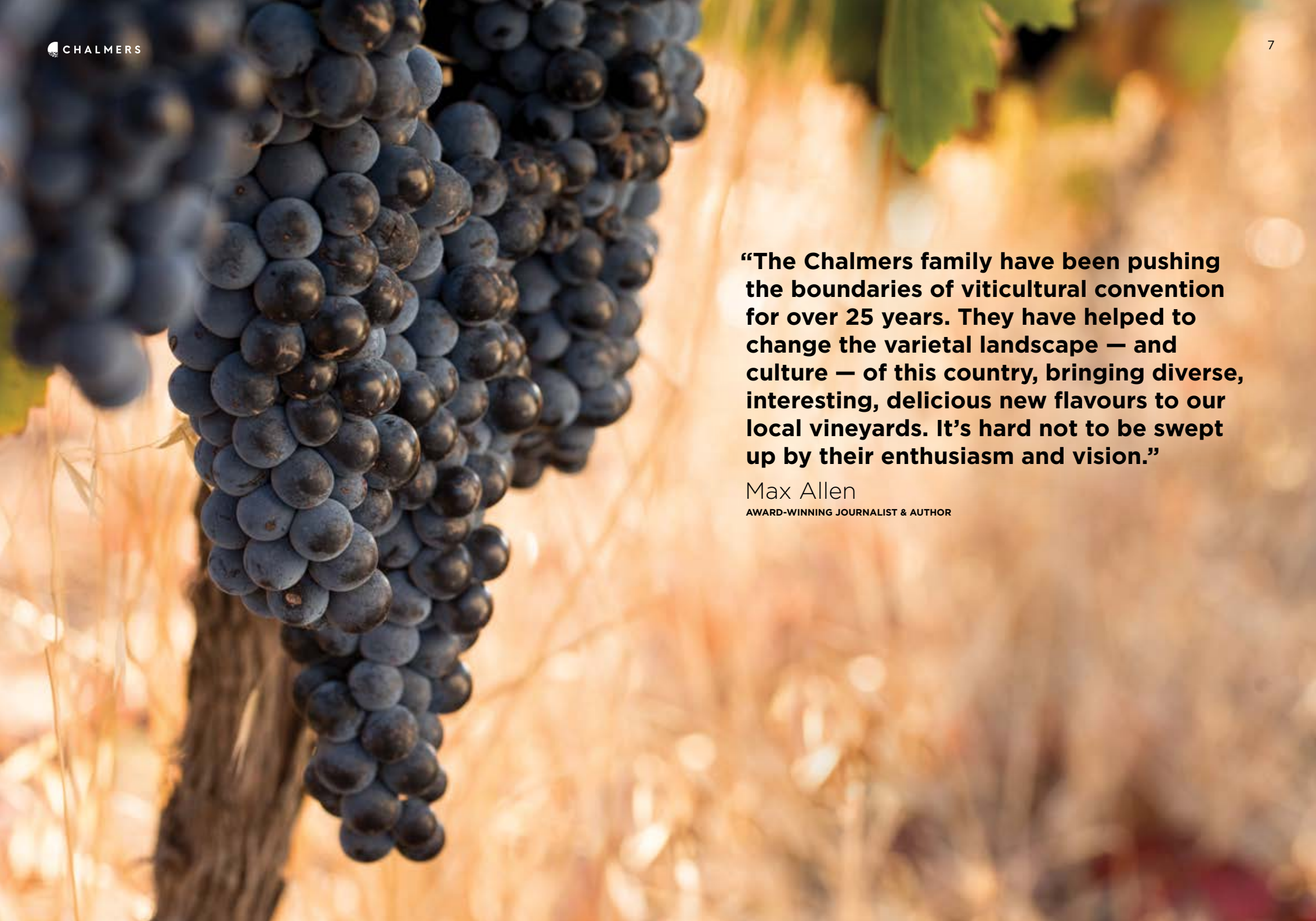


For over three decades the Chalmers family have fine-tuned their sustainable, warm-climate viticulture practices while also being the leader in the importation and propagation of climate-apt Italian varieties. Through endlessly evolving nursery, vineyard and winemaking trials, Chalmers has changed the face of Australian wine. The brands under the Chalmers umbrella represent the fruits of those labours, wines made with a gentle hand that reflect an ever-inquisitive mission to craft expressions of ancient grapes that are uniquely reflective of their new homes.

Chalmers is a family operation, with Bruce and Jenni working alongside their daughters, Kim and Tennille. Kim's husband, Bart van Olphen, takes the reins in the bespoke Merbein winery, where all the wines are made, relying solely on the bountiful native yeast population for fermentation and employing a variety of vessels and traditional, manual techniques to frame varietal character and build texture and complexity.

Many of the grapes in the Chalmers Nursery Collection have been chosen for their ability to thrive in warm and dry conditions. That selection has presented exciting new prospects for making vibrant and elegant wines in warm to hot climates, and from vines that can be farmed sustainably with long-term climate suitability. It has also enhanced the capacity for quality white wine production in areas where fuller reds have traditionally dominated – it's not just about grapes suited to the conditions, but equally about wines best suited to the climate.

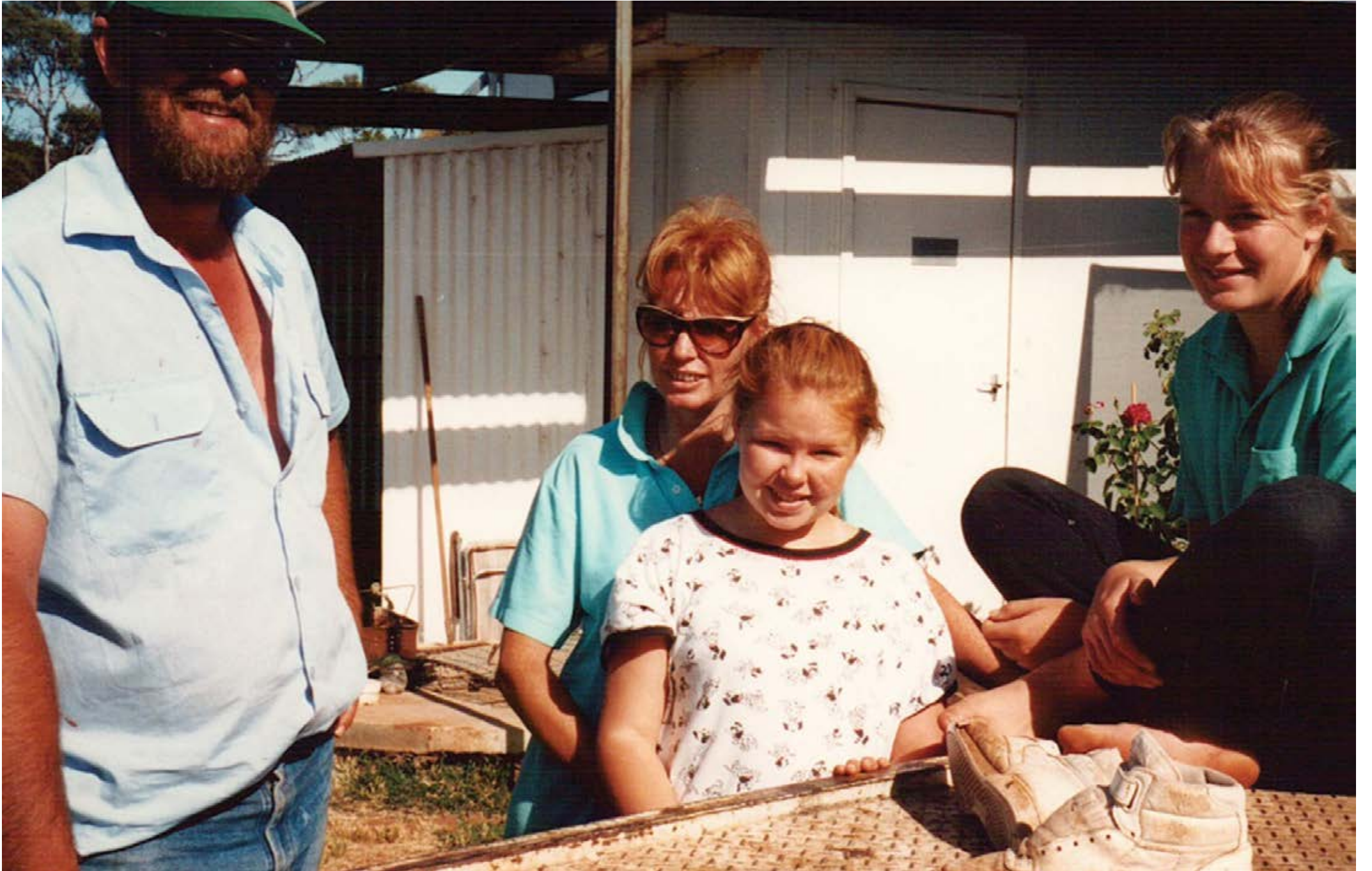




“The Chalmers family have been pushing the boundaries of viticultural convention for over 25 years. They have helped to change the varietal landscape — and culture — of this country, bringing diverse, interesting, delicious new flavours to our local vineyards. It’s hard not to be swept up by their enthusiasm and vision.”

Max Allen

AWARD-WINNING JOURNALIST & AUTHOR



THE NURSERY



The Chalmers Merbein property is home to the Chalmers Nursery Collection, a catalogue of around 100 varieties and clones, with a primary focus on climate-appt Italian grapes. The collection also includes a significant boost to the clonal material available for key hero varieties, such as Nebbiolo, Sangiovese and Barbera. The nursery supplies grafted vines, rootlings and cuttings to vineyards across the country.

Working with world-leading Italian nursery Vivai Cooperativi Rauscedo (VCR) and, through a connection with winemaker Alberto Antonini and agronomist Stefano Dini of Gruppo Matura, Chalmers source the best material available for importation. This is an ongoing program, with new varieties and clones continually assessed, and always with suitability to climatic conditions allied with high-quality, distinctive wine production in mind.

In the 1980s, Bruce and Jenni Chalmers were principally fruit and vegetable growers when a contract to graft grapevines turned into a burgeoning business, becoming Australia's largest wine-grape nursery providers by the mid-'90s. It was not long after that when the enterprise acquired an Italian accent, inspired by a friendship with Dr Rod Bonfiglioli and Stefano de Pieri. It was

this cohort that established the Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show and championed a broader exploration of Italian grapes that were suited not just to their Murray Darling base, but also to many regions around the country.

In 1998, Chalmers became the exclusive Australian agent for VCR, importing around 70 grape varieties and clones many of which had never been available in Australia. That first tranche of vines was introduced in 2000, with planting beginning in earnest. That first shipment notably included varieties that have become fixtures of our vinous landscape, including Nero d'Avola, Vermentino, Fiano, Aglianico, Montepulciano and Sagrantino.

Those initial imports also included cuttings of lesser-known grapes Schioppettino, Negroamaro, Marzemino, Malvasia Istriana and Nosiola, amongst others. Since then, varieties and clones have been added over the years, including Ansonica, Falanghina, Grechetto, Pecorino, Piediroso, Ribolla Gialla, Teroldego and Uva di Troia, as well as the long awaited quarantine clearance of Nerello Mascalese and Carricante.

The Chalmers vine material is rigorously field-tested in both the home Merbein Vineyard, in the Murray Darling, and in the Heathcote Vineyard on the Mount Camel



Range, while also undergoing extensive winemaking trials in Merbein. Those processes inform the path for subsequent Chalmers plantings and estate wines, but also provide an invaluable resource for nursery clients, with more than 2.5 million vines from these imported varieties planted and producing wine across almost every Australian winegrowing region.

The Australian wine landscape has been forever reshaped with varieties

that are suited to our changing climate and evolving drinking habits, but more than that, they are ideal for forward-thinking growers that prize environmental goals. They need less water and less intervention in general, and they can produce exceptional fruit in even the most demanding climates. Planted in the right places and farmed well, these emerging varieties are inherently less taxing on the environment - they are models of sustainability.



THE VINEYARDS



MERBEIN



AVERAGE CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

Summer Day Temperature	32°C	90°F
Summer Night Temperature	17°C	63°F
Winter Day Temperature	15°C	59°F
Winter Night Temperature	5°C	41°F
Annual Rainfall	285mm	11.2"

CHALMERS MERBEIN VINEYARD

118 THIRD ST, MERBEIN, VICTORIA 3505

NJERI NJERI COUNTRY

The Chalmers Merbein base, with its original 1913 homestead sheltered under towering Norfolk pines, is home to the nursery, winery and the precious resource of mother vine material that is the heart of the operation.

The old settlement site was acquired in 2010, with immediate planting in the red sand and limestone soils under the Murray Darling's arching canopy of blue sky. The Merbein vineyard is home to grapes for both Chalmers wines and to supply other makers. It is also where varieties are put through their paces to test which viticultural practices work best – from rootstocks, density, trellising, water use etc. through to ideal crop loads and picking dates.

These trials are intimately linked to the work in the onsite winery, where the results are shown in finished form. It's where style directions are developed for the Chalmers ranges, and it's also a tool to properly assess where these varieties are best planted. This is vital information for nursery clients, and determines where and how future blocks are planted and

managed, right down to small nuances of soil, geology, aspect and exposure.

The Merbein vineyard is home to the mother block of the Chalmers Nursery Collection consisting of around 50 grape varieties encompassing over 100 clones grown for propagation material and wine production, from trial rows and micro-parcels to more commercially sized blocks. Focus varieties have been selected for their suitability to the conditions, with lower water needs, heat tolerance and, most importantly, the potential to make exceptional wine that speaks of place.

The Merbein Vineyard is also home to bush vine blocks of Inzolia and Negroamaro planted to an old orange orchard on a distinctive sandy rise. These blocks are planted at 1,600 vines per hectare with the un-trellised vine structure that is traditional in parts of southern Italy, where the grapes hail from, but innovative for the Murray Darling. Drought-tolerant rootstocks seek underground water, and only minimal irrigation is supplied, if required, overhead to mimic rainfall, though the end goal is to exclude irrigation entirely.





HEATHCOTE



AVERAGE CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

Summer Day Temperature	30°C	86°F
Summer Night Temperature	14°C	57°F
Winter Day Temperature	13°C	55°F
Winter Night Temperature	2°C	36°F
Annual Rainfall	513mm	20.2"

CHALMERS HEATHCOTE VINEYARD

3233 HEATHCOTE-ROCHESTER RD,
COLBINABBIN, VICTORIA 3559

TAUNGURUNG COUNTRY

In 2008, the family purchased 80 hectares of farmland on Heathcote's Mount Camel Range in the north of the region. The vineyard was established with high-end wine production in mind, both for the family label and as a fruit source for established and emerging makers, supplying grapes to more than 40 winemakers each year.

The site, on a gentle east-facing slope, ranging from 150 metres to 225 metres above sea level, allowed for planting with the distillation of hard-won experience and, significantly, with intimate familiarity of the climate-appt grapes that were selected as most suitable – the vineyard had 26 varieties planted as of the 2024 vintage.

That clean slate saw the vineyard planted to ideal specifications, with high-density on an east-to-west row orientation to encourage even ripening and allow airflow down the slope to mitigate disease pressure. Additionally, rootstocks were carefully matched to both varieties and

soils. The first vines were planted in 2009, with the inaugural vintage coming in 2011.

The fabled red Cambrian soils are a feature of the site, but there is nuanced intricacy to soils and geology, with the famous red clay loam predominating on the lower parts of the slope, while the higher reaches are rocky, with a complex mix of ironstone, dolerite, green basalt and jasper. Those bottom sections are more fertile, while the top section is tougher going, making for lower yielding vines and wines of detail, elegance and mineral reflection.

Over time, sections of the vineyard have been identified that have performed exceptionally well with certain varieties, moving beyond varietal expression to tell an intimate story of place, conveying soil, aspect and macroclimate. Some of the early stars were Fiano, Nero d'Avola, Aglianico, Greco and Vermentino, while later, Falanghina, Pecorino and Piediroso, for example, have all shown a special affinity with their carefully selected blocks.



“One of the great strengths of the Australian wine scene is in its opportunity to change and evolve in a way that traditional wine growing regions perhaps cannot. Over my career, it has been a pleasure to watch the way that restaurant guests, and wine consumers more broadly, have moved away from a constrained choice of Chardonnay or Shiraz - despite the fact that we grow and make them so well - and towards a rainbow of varieties, styles, regions and techniques. It’s no secret that the Chalmers family have played a significant role in bringing new colour, flavour and texture to Australian wine drinkers. Whether considering climate suitability or a modern sensibility for how we consume wine, the availability of new varieties and clones makes Australian wine a better and more interesting drink – for today, and for tomorrow.”

Leanne Altmann

AWARD-WINNING SOMMELIER, WINE WRITER & WINE JUDGE





SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability – a respect for the land, and an understanding that if you take, you must put back – has always been a central pillar of the Chalmers story. And that is something that will always be improved on, from biodiversity and farming through winemaking and packaging to water and energy use across the business. Supporting the community and ensuring that operations are economically viable for the long term are also essential components of the sustainability mission.

Bruce and Jenni had long eschewed chemical fertilisers in the vineyard, and their approach to land management decades ago was revolutionary in the Murray Darling. A focus on preserving trees and remnant scrub, while also revegetating non-vineyard land, were always high priorities, building a natural haven for indigenous flora and fauna, including critically endangered birdlife for a symbiotic and sustainable relationship between the vineyard and the bush.

There is considerable biodiversity of flora and fauna on both properties, with beneficial insect and bird species helping to manage pest populations, while the evidence of a rich presence of microflora is evidenced by the buoyant native yeast

population. The Merbein property has been extensively analysed, and over 500 indigenous yeast strains have been documented. That's not only a boon for winemaking, but it's also a barometer of stewardship enhancing the local environment.

The viticultural processes focus on fostering soils rich in microbial life, which have shown a measurable increase in organic matter through applications of mulch, compost, humic acid and seaweed. These methods have also seen a significant increase in the soil's water-holding capacity, lessening the burden on precious water resources and helping to maintain viable waterways. That reliance is further reduced with drought- and heat-tolerant varieties and rootstocks. Targeted irrigation further reduces water usage, which in Merbein is about 60% of the regional average.

Over half of the onsite energy use is covered by solar power, with new approaches constantly sought to improve that figure. The energy impact of the business is also reduced in other ways, such as using lightweight bottles, which are less energy intensive to produce and transport. Where possible, wine labels are



made from recycled materials, and light-grade or recycled cardboard is used for cartons.

The business employs a large local workforce in the vineyards, nursery and winery. They are all part of the broader Chalmers family, with much of the diverse, multicultural team having worked in the business for many years, and they have just as much rigour, enthusiasm and pride in the work as the family themselves do. The Chalmers family believe a thriving community is also vital, so the business prioritises partnerships with local schools, sporting and charity groups and actively

supports the arts and artists both locally and nationally.

Lastly, it is essential that the Chalmers business is successful for generations to come, and that success goes hand in hand with the regions being strong. That economic sustainability hinges directly on the environment being nurtured, but it is also about celebrating what the regions do best. All the sustainable practices lead to exciting wine, and in turn that helps to enhance the prestige of place. Working alongside like-minded winegrowers who understand the importance of climate-apt varieties bolsters this further.



WINEMAKING





The Chalmers wines are all fundamentally expressions of place – of soil and geology, of climate and sensitive farming – seen through the filter of grape varieties that have adapted over thousands of years. They are wines reflective of a new home, with gentle, non-prescriptive winemaking coaxing out unique expressions – wines that magnify the impression of place while respecting the material.

Native yeasts are employed, with a richly diverse population in the vineyards. No introduced yeasts have ever been used in the winery, so this complexity is maintained through the whole winemaking process. The assortment of wild yeasts also differs from year to year, so each ferment progresses in its own way, with its own nuances.

A large array of maturation vessels is used, and whenever oak is employed, it is older. Wood flavour is never sought in the wines. Rather, barrels are used when a wine needs to breathe, when it will benefit from gently

relaxing in oak. The use of lees is similarly responsive. Some varieties interact better with full solids and others to finer, fluffier lees, just as some need racking, while others need to rest undisturbed.

Skin contact is occasionally employed on white grapes when it suits the wine. But in general, phenolics are carefully managed to build subtle texture and tension, to enhance and never dominate, and always nuanced to align with variety. Similarly, some red varieties are suited to being pressed just after fermenting dry, while others are enhanced by an extended maceration.

The cornerstones of the Chalmers range are varietal wines made in an array of styles, from sparklings right through to appassimento dessert wines, while field blends further deepen the offer. With all the wines, there is no recipe aside from the philosophy of a gentle hand guided by the spirit of experimentation, quiet observation, experience and faith in intuition.





“It’s fantastic working with Kim and Tennille, as everyone brings something different to the winemaking process. It’s dynamic between the three of us. We treat the Italian varieties with respect, but we are making Australian wine and we don’t lose sight of that.”

Bart van Olphen

WINEMAKER, CHALMERS





THE FUTURE

Chalmers is a family business with the second generation working side by side with the first, but it is one that is built with an eye to a distant horizon. The pillar of working with varieties suited to the regions in a sustainable way is central to the long-term future of wine quality, resource management, economic stability and environmental responsibility, and it is the platform that will be the basis of the family's business for generations to come.

The other key to the future is embedded in Chalmers DNA, which is the spirit of adaptation and evolution. As much as has been learnt, there is so much more to know. The quest to enhance the Chalmers Nursery Collection with new varieties and clonal diversity is an ongoing one, as is the work at finding both the most suited viticultural and winemaking methods for those vines. The Chalmers family is proud of just how far they've come, but they're equally as excited by what comes next.







THE CHALMERS FAMILY ACKNOWLEDGES THE TRADITIONAL OWNERS OF THE LANDS AND WATERWAYS
THAT WE RELY ON TO GROW GRAPES AND MAKE WINE. WE PAY RESPECT TO THEIR ANCIENT AND
LIVING CULTURE AND EMBRACE THEIR PHILOSOPHY OF CARING FOR COUNTRY IN THE WAY WE FARM.

The Chalmers family are proud of our heritage
as visionary vine importers and grape growers.
Our sense of adventure and spirit of sharing have
helped shape today's colourful Australian wine scene.

CHALMERS.COM.AU

