



Many centuries of secrets revealed inside the barrel

Wooden barrels have been used for thousands of years to store and transport wines and spirits. Over the centuries, winemakers have found that oak grown in Europe and North America is best for cooperage.

During the wood maturation process, oak flavours dissolve from the wood into the wine. Wine seeps into the wood and meets air, which is filtered as it passes through the pores of the wood. This allows very slow oxidation of the wine. Many of the more astringent and bitter components precipitate out of the wine. Integrated fruit and wood flavours make the wine more mellow and subtle. Volatile aromatics become more complex and full with the addition of oak aromas, providing the perfect base for bottle maturation.

The winemaker has three major factors to consider when preparing wine for barrel maturation.

First, he must marry wine and wood. The correct variety of oak must be chosen to complement the grape flavours. The wine must be well structured and balanced for it to benefit from finishing fermentation in barrels.

Next to consider is the size of the barrel to be used. The size affects the rates of maturation and evaporation. The barrel most often used in Australia is the hogshead (300 litres), followed by the barrique (225 litres) and the puncheon (475 litres).

Thirdly, there is the cost of wood maturation. Barrels take up a lot of room and require a lot of manual handling.

There is evaporation and leakage loss, the cost of wine and labour to keep each barrel topped up and the cost of barrels — \$600 to \$800 each. Barrels have a life of about three years. By then, most of the desirable wood characters have been leached out. The winemaker must give the wine a lot of care and attention and taste it often to assess the progress of maturation.

The Australian wine industry uses three main varieties of oak — Nevers and Limousin from France, and American oak. Each variety of oak has different flavour characteristics. Nevers oak adds a characteristic "cigar box" aroma, while Limousin imparts a fleshy fullness to the palate and adds a delicate wood aroma to the bouquet. American oak adds a fragrant, sweet character to the bouquet, complements the spiciness of shiraz and the full softness of chardonnay.

There are no rules about how long a wine should be matured in wood, nor which wood to use for which grape variety, but selecting wood and wine to complement each other is one of the most important aspects of the winemaker's art. This month we are featuring four wines of excellent value. These wines are available in dozen lots, straight or mixed.

ELDERTON 1993 VERY BEST DRY WHITE

This wine is very dry. It is matured in French and American oaks, which adds further complexity to a refreshing wine.

NORMAL PRICE \$137.40 doz.
SPECIAL PRICE \$109.80 doz.

TOLLEYS 1993 CELLAR RESERVE CHARDONNAY

The palate shows full lemony characters and its soft finish renders it ideal for consumption now.

NORMAL PRICE \$107.40 doz.
SPECIAL PRICE \$85.20 doz.

ROSEDALE RIDGE 1991 CLASSIC DRY RED

The colour is deep red, while the palate is medium — bodied, soft, fruity, easy drinking in style and also a wine to enjoy now.

NORMAL PRICE \$91.20 doz.
SPECIAL PRICE \$71.40 doz.

HOUGHTON 1991 CABERNET SAUVIGNON

This one is made from grapes grown in the Franklin River and Margaret River vineyards. The wine exhibits a deep crimson colour, rich fruit and oak flavours. It is suitable for drinking now or for cellaring for five to seven years.

NORMAL PRICE \$131.40 doz.
SPECIAL PRICE \$107.40 doz.

MIXED DOZ (3 each wine) \$93.45
MIXED RED (6 each red) \$89.40
MIXED WHITE (6 each white) \$97.50.