

# HIGHBANK

As you drive along the Riddoch Highway north from Penola, you pass many wineries, right and left, and then you encounter one of Coonawarra's smallest, Highbank, situated on the left graced by the well appointed *Cottage and Room with a View* which provide excellent accommodation for the wine-interested traveller. Out front there is a signpost indicating the distances to various parts of the world - this is no idle gimmick as Highbank exports some 90 percent of its produce. Thankfully, with the recent reforms to the WET tax, we will see an increasing presence of Dennis Vice's wines on the Australian market.

With help from winemaker Trevor Mast, Highbank is producing some of Coonawarra's finest wines. Highbank's small operation allows Dennis, a viticulturalist, to take a hands-on approach to every aspect of production. Hand pruning, fruit thinning and hand harvesting complement the organic methods used. Dennis tries to pick his fruit as early as possible (sometimes up to six weeks earlier than others) while ensuring physiologically ripe grapes at moderate alcohol levels around 13.5%.



On our visit to Coonawarra, Dennis showed the *Winewise* team two of his currently available wines and one soon to be released. Here are our tasting notes:

**2001 Highbank Coonawarra Basket-Pressed Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot/Cabernet Franc** Enticing nose with a wonderful amalgam of cassis, violets and blackcurrant aromas, very fine but intense. The wine is elegant, with its sweet fruit dancing on top of a fine grained tannin structure which carries all the flavours on a long, lingering palate. Refined drinking even now but will benefit considerably from bottle age. This is the 10<sup>th</sup> vintage of this wine and it's hard to imagine any previous release topping this example. (\$45.00 ex cellar)  
*Outstanding*

**2001 Highbank Coonawarra Basket-Pressed Merlot** Just when you think Australia has lost its way with this variety, you encounter a merlot with real texture. This is just such a wine highlighted by a fine, spicy fragrance of ripe plums and red berries. It has an intensely flavoured middle palate supported by very fine tannins and a long, lingering finish. Its tight structure cries out for cellaring. (\$85.00)  
*Outstanding*

**2002 Highbank Coonawarra Basket-Pressed Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot/Cabernet Franc** (Soon to be released) Upon first opening, the wine displayed a distinct leafy edge with cedary overtones. However, with some breathing, it blossomed to reveal blackcurrant aromas and flavours with a spicy edge and Highbank's trademark fine grained tannin structure. This wine definitely needs more time in the bottle. *Highly Recommended.*

**Len Sorbello**

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