

You'll find them down dirt roads, beneath the tin roofs of ramshackle sheds, amid secondhand tanks and creaky basket presses. They are Western Australia's newest generation of winemakers and they're pushing winemaking boundaries in this isolated state. Thanks to WA's burgeoning restaurant and bar scene, where knowledgeable sommeliers create adventurous lists for increasingly well-travelled and open-minded wine drinkers, the call for wines made in an experimental and playful spirit has never been louder. And these winemakers are responding. They're throwing out the rule book and doing things their own way.

In the heat of the Swan Valley lurks one of WA's biggest surprises. Alon and Jodi Arbel at **Bella Ridge Estate** ([www.bellaridge.com.au](http://www.bellaridge.com.au)) are making textured, oxidative and cellar-worthy wines from organically grown old vines and with a hands-off philosophy. "This is everything you learn not to do as an Aussie winemaker," says Alon with a cheeky grin, waving his cloudy unsulphured rosé in the air.

Israeli born Alon Arbel landed on WA's shores in the early 1990s, he met his wife Jodi shortly after and decided to stay. In his final year as an engineering student Jodi talked a disillusioned Alon into pursuing a career in winemaking and enrolled him in a course. After he completed his degree at Curtin University, he and Jodi purchased their 25-acre property in the Swan Valley. Originally intending to sell grapes, their plan rapidly changed and they found themselves producing small quantities of wine under their own label.

Today Jodi takes care of the administration side of things while Alon, with assistant winemaker Justin Stobie, is busy producing a wide range of wines including chenin blanc, semillon, viognier, petit verdot, tempranillo, malbec and kyoho, a Japanese grape, used to make a semi-sweet style of wine, which was planted by the Japanese former owner. The Arbels couldn't bear to rip it out.

Bella Ridge Estate lies on a bowl-shaped strip of gravelly loam soil at the base of the Darling Ranges. The 65-year-old vines are almost entirely non-irrigated – not easy in the hot and dry Swan Valley. Yields are kept low and grapes are hand-picked. Much of Bella Ridge's fruit is estate grown but Alon buys a small amount of grapes including trebbiano from his 90-year-old Italian neighbour who brought the cuttings over from Calabria.

Once in the winery, Alon uses all native yeasts and no additives except a sprinkling of sulphur before bottling. He employs lengthy ageing in tanks and older barrels and does not fine. The wines, purposely oxidative, are incredibly textured, complex and age-worthy, influenced in style by those from ultra-traditional producers like R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia in Rioja or Chateau Musar in Lebanon.

"I'm very influenced by European wines," says Alon. "I don't worry about the technicalities, I feel the wine. I'll try

our GSM for ages and say stuff it and throw it out. Or I'll taste it once and decide it's ready. There's a lot more intuition than anything else." Like those of producers Alon is most influenced by, his wines come alive with food. "Sommeliers love them," he says. Bella Ridge Estate wines are listed in some of the country's top restaurants.