



# ZEMA ESTATE

## TRADITIONAL COONAWARRA

### REVIEW

#### WINE

## Road to Coonawarra

The story of the Zema family of Coonawarra, says Nick Zema, "is there, in those bottles". When the clan gathered last year to celebrate their 25th vintage, they put 79 bottles on to the tasting bench. "It was very satisfying, as they reflect the Zema philosophy," Zema says. Which is? First, that wine is created in the vineyard, which these days is 64 hectares of prized Coonawarra soil. But it was humble beginnings when Nick's parents, Demetrio and Francesca, started the business. Travelling a long road from Calabria to Coonawarra, it was 23 years before they bought their first three hectares, in 1982. But they made wine and never looked back. They're very much a part of the estate, although Nick and brother Matt run the business today. As for those 79 bottles full of stories, family members and friends of this esteemed and close-knit winemaking operation gathered together and spent the day tasting history. "I was really proud," says Zema. "One or two wines looked a bit tired but a few jumped out, a curveball of surprises, such as the 1983 shiraz." For a 24-year-old wine from a vintage that was written off, it looked terrific, he says. Also at the tasting was Greg Clayfield, a winemaker with 30 years experience, most of it in Coonawarra. He joined Zema not long before the remarkable tasting. Zema says the '06 vintage, still a few years from being released, is exciting because the wines are "Greg's babies

— he's brought another perspective and experience to us that money just can't buy". Clayfield won't be changing the family style, Zema says, "but there's always room for improvement as he brings his own ideas and philosophies here". Reflecting on these past 25 years, Zema says in the first decade there was little choice in winemaking — there wasn't enough fruit or money to allow the luxury of experimentation. Of course, change has happened, coinciding with better viticultural and winemaking practices in general. Stalks are removed to avoid green tannins, pressings of the fruit are softer, and the oak regime is finely tuned. The biggest change is with the shiraz, especially in the use of oak; it used to be aged almost entirely in American oak, which can be overpowering, but today it goes into a balanced mix of French and American oak barrels. As for the '04 vintage, the current release of red wines, "it was an absolute dream", Zema says. "It's very satisfying with vintages like that because both shiraz and cabernet look good. There's some good mint in the cabernet and spice and pepper in the shiraz. Even the merlot turned out to be one of the best." The 2005 vintage is also outstanding and might prove to be the best of the decade. Time will tell — those wines will be released by the middle of 2008.

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JANE FAULKNER

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#### ZEMA ESTATE FAMILY SELECTION CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2004 \$45

Family Selection means the best parcels of fruit are turned into Zema's top wine. This is a stunning Coonawarra cabernet sauvignon that's full of mulberry, blackberry and plum, with a hint of the region's enticing menthol/minty note with savoury, ripe, yet fine and dusty tannins. Plenty of spice notes, with cedary oak perfectly integrated.



#### ZEMA ESTATE FAMILY SELECTION SHIRAZ 2004 \$45

This is no shy wine — far from it at 15.5 per cent alcohol — but it holds it well as a youngster, although ageing might prove differently. Now it's opulent with loads of attractive, sweet ripe fruit and plush tannins. The palate opens up with fruit cake and cedar notes alongside a mineral, almost ferrous note and fine acidity. There's black pepper and spice that altogether scream Coonawarra shiraz.



#### ZEMA ESTATE SHIRAZ 2004 \$26

Shiraz at this price doesn't come much better. It's chock full of up-front fruit, particularly red plums. There's some blueberry notes, too, with a touch of pepper, all of which follow through on the palate. It's medium-bodied with firm tannins holding together this terrific, drinking wine.



