



# LOCATING SUBURBIA

MEMORY - PLACE - CREATIVITY

EDITED BY

PAULA HAMILTON & PAUL ASHTON

Locating Suburbia  
Memory, Place, Creativity

Edited by

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton



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# INTRODUCTION

## *THE POLITICS AND PASSIONS OF THE SUBURBAN OASIS*

Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton

Murder in the suburbs isn't murder technically at all really is it? It's a justifiable reaction to aesthetic deprivation and golf.<sup>1</sup>

Suburbia has been satirised and mocked by the best of them from George Orwell's 1939 caricature in *Coming up for Air* to Dame Edna Everidge from the 1960s and TV's Kath and Kim in twentieth-first century Australia. For many of the generation growing up in the twentieth century, suburbia is, on the one hand, the remembered nightmare from which the human chrysalis escaped to experience adulthood and its pleasures *elsewhere* – the stifling, conformist sameness which nonetheless hid evil deeds like murder. Others hold dear the wistful nostalgic memories about growing up in a domesticated cosy world of backyard games so effectively mobilised by conservative Prime Minister John Howard during the 1990s in relation to Earlwood, a suburb of Sydney.<sup>2</sup>

It is certainly the case that for the older generation who lived through depression and war in the twentieth century, the suburbs represented safety and peace – 'a roof over our heads'; 'a place to call our own'. Like the soldier who came back from Changi POW camp, kissed the ground at Narrabeen, a suburb in Sydney, and said: 'this'll do me'!, the expanding suburbs after the 1950s were the retreat for many men after

time abroad in global conflict; a place to replenish the spirit and build again – individual lives, families, homes, garages, sheds, gardens, lawns. Suburbs have also been long hated,<sup>3</sup> and more recently loved,<sup>4</sup> by writers and intellectuals. They have also been perceived with an uneasy ambiguity, as ‘being neither town nor country, but an unwilling combination of both, and either neat and shining, or cheap and nasty, according to the incomes of its inhabitants’.<sup>5</sup> This was the ‘half world between city and country in which most Australians lived’ that architect Robin Boyd decried in his elitist work on Australia domestic architecture.<sup>6</sup> Recently, however, there has been a strong and growing interest in delineating the complexities of the suburban experience rather than simply denouncing or defending it.

Over the last twenty to thirty years, suburbia has had a make-over. How it is remembered and what place it has had in our lives has also been reconfigured. Many now accept that the nostalgia relates only to a childhood dream of the white Anglo-Saxon part of the population that obscured a great deal more than it revealed. Certainly the historian Andrew May argued in 2009 that ‘the reliance of the twin fictions of the novelist’s pen and of baby-boomer nostalgia for our predominant images of post-war suburban history precludes the prospect of developing more sophisticated historical narratives’.<sup>7</sup> Even before the impact of the massive post-war migration, the suburbs were more culturally and socially diverse than we have previously understood. Class and religious divisions, if not always race and ethnicity, have a long history within suburban communities.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays, the articulation of that nostalgic memory in public forums is strongly contested, as suburban places are made and remade over time.

In March 2013, for example, Peter Roberts wrote a column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* which had the heading: ‘What happened to the suburb I used to know? His particular suburb was Greenacre near Lakemba in Sydney and his article juxtaposed a suburban past and present. He remembers a suburb where he grew up during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a place of peace, sparsely populated, filled with boys sports and games:

Lakemba? Sure that’s where we went to the Sunday matinee at the Odeon every week and watched such pearls as the Three Stooges, Jerry Lewis and Ben-Hur.

Roberts does not mention that Lakemba is now the site of a mosque and one of the biggest Muslim communities in Australia. But most of the *Herald* readers will have this in mind. In his (Anglo-Saxon) memory, there was no violence as there is now, which he blames on the ‘enclave of Little Lebanon’. Greenacre and Lakemba now, he says, have been ‘turned into a minefield, or a battlefield, or a refuge



of drug dealers, criminals, drive-by shooters and terror'. His elegaic tone is one of sadness and loss:

That was my home – the place where I once simply couldn't imagine living anywhere else – transformed to the place where I could never imagine living again.

There were several responses to this letter which seemed to strike a Sydney nerve and gave readers a sense of how the media mediates our collective memories. At least two letters accused Roberts of cloaking racism in nostalgia. Omar Sakr replied in the same edition of the *Herald* with an awareness about the public prominence of such views and how they need to be interrogated. Sakr is particularly critical of the assumption that all of the problems are the result of another ethnic group, as though murder and rape were not part of any other suburban culture. This view, he says, absolves one group for taking responsibility for the problems of the community as a whole. For him, growing up in this area probably twenty or thirty years later, the most important element was the camaraderie of his diverse delinquent friends.

One letter, though, was from someone who had lived for eighteen months in Lakemba until recently and also spent time there on a regular basis now. Con Vaitsas, now of Ashbury, claimed that Roberts' vision was 'way out of whack with reality' and very outdated. He argued that Greenacre and Lakemba were no longer predominantly the home of the Lebanese but a mixture of very different nationalities living peacefully side by side: 'my neighbours were Filipinos and Colombians on either side and Africans opposite us', he wrote. So his perception was one of a successful multicultural community.

Such an exchange does little to recognise the complexity of current suburban life but it does juxtapose the memories from different generations and cultures against one another as alternative experiences of belonging to particular suburban localities.

### **What is Suburbia?**

Suburbs are geographically defined areas on a map, spatially located in our memories and also an idea: they colonise our imaginations as both inside and outside the pale. But beyond the government defined boundaries, how are they delineated? Are they anything beyond the city central? Inner city areas such as Surry Hills or Balmain are certainly not brought to mind by this term. Spatially the suburbs are seen as 'out there' away from the inner city which somehow don't meet the criteria for single story occupation on a block of land which we think of as characteristically suburban. But where does the inner city begin and end now? Redfern, Waterloo, Alexandria, Drummoyne,

St Leonard's? 'As a state of mind and a way of living', Humphrey McQueen has observed,

Suburbia is not confined to certain geographic areas but can thrive where there are no suburbs... It is pointless to lay down a criterion for suburbia that includes duplexes, but excludes a row of terraces. Where it survives outside its natural habitat, suburbia still aspires to the ways of living that are most completely realised by nuclear families on garden blocks with detached houses.<sup>9</sup>

The identity of suburbia, so far as it can be ascribed one, is shifting and insecure; a borderline and liminal space.<sup>10</sup> Dominant stereotypes have listed it as 'on the margins' beyond edges of cultural sophistication and tradition' and the areas that make up 'sprawl'.<sup>11</sup> But in the twenty-first century this static view has to be modified somewhat. And it is evident from this collection that suburban dwellers themselves have redefined being cosmopolitan as house prices in the inner suburbs skyrocket and push people further afield.<sup>12</sup>

The study of suburbs is often viewed as separate from the city or the urban as a whole. But in fact not only are suburbs obviously integral; they are now part of the networked city, reinforcing much older electricity grids, transport and water services with contemporary communications networks, especially the internet and mobile telephony which has facilitated greater interaction between suburbs and across the urban generally. Suburbs are always relational in this sense and though we tend to throw a light on the local or the small concerns within the suburb as case studies, this collection does not argue for their isolation from the wider urban landscape, for we know that local knowledge too, has the power to change lives.

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This collection was set up as a collaborative project by members of the Research Strength in Creative Practices and Cultural Economy at the University of Technology, Sydney, is in the first instance a testament to that range and complexity of twenty-first century responses to city suburbs, predominantly in Sydney, though with a nod to other suburban contexts on the most-populated eastern seaboard of Australia, such as Melbourne and Brisbane. Secondly, the collection showcases the lively engagement and interdisciplinary nature of the intellectual culture in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Technology, Sydney, from the more traditional scholarly approaches of Humanities scholars to the range of cultural forms which make up Creative Practice in the academy, especially in this

case, Creative Writing and Media Arts.<sup>13</sup> We had many seminars and discussions which took place in 2011 and 2012 about the ideas for the collection. We began by viewing it from the perspective of lived experience, always believing it possible that new technologies can create different spaces for collaborative scholarship within the traditional frame of a book.

And so it proved. We found that the tension between representing how a world was experienced while keeping that detached critical eye on its form and nature could work very well through a range of artistic and scholarly practice that spoke to each other. Karen Till, writing about her own engagement with memory studies as an artist, argues that more traditional scholars have a lot to gain by heeding the work of artists 'who also acknowledge the ways that people experience memory as multi-sensual, spatial ways of understanding their worlds'.<sup>14</sup>

Three distinct themes emerged in relation to the central concept of re-imagining the suburban which people researched and made for this publication. As our title indicates these became remembered suburbs anchored either by our own personal past or those of others, suburbs as places that were made and remade across time and suburbs not only as the subject for various creative representations but also increasingly where creativity as an identified practice or industry takes place.<sup>15</sup>

Some of our essays take as their subject particular suburbs such as Bondi, Manly and Campbelltown. Others range across time and the space of the urban and suburban. Others focus on those inner city in-betweens, subject of urban renewal and consolidation, such as Marrickville, Pyrmont and Balmain. Some utilise the concept of the even more local through a focus on the park, shops, the backyard or the suburban house. And still others explore what took place in the homes of these areas there that came to be identified with suburban life.

Referring to the suburbs of England, Roger Silverstone previously commented in his 1997 book *Visions of Suburbia* that 'An understanding of how suburbia was produced and continues to be both produced and reproduced is an essential precondition for an understanding of the twentieth century, an understanding above all of our emerging character and contradictions of our everyday lives'.<sup>16</sup> Whether his argument for the centrality of suburbia to historical understanding still holds for the twenty-first century remains to be seen given the many different shapes it now takes in our imaginations.



09

LIQUID DESIRE

David Aylward

# LIQUID DESIRE

## A MAP OF WINE DRINKING IN SYDNEY

David Aylward

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*Consumption patterns of liquor, and particularly wine, have changed dramatically over the past two decades. In industrialised economies, both Eastern and Western, there has been a steep increase in first-time wine consumers, and a change of behaviour among regular wine consumers.<sup>1</sup>*

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Since the early 1990s wine road shows, trade fairs, magazines, newspaper articles and formal quality rankings have led to an educated and increasingly discerning wine consumer base. One result of this changing base is a shift from cask to bottled wine, with a corresponding decrease in volume consumed but increase in price-points.<sup>2</sup>

Wine industries across the globe are attempting to accommodate this shift by transforming their process models away from the mass production that dominated the latter part of the 20th century and toward a more segmented, flexible mode. This has created its own unique set of challenges, and in markets where change has been slow, the consumer has quickly diverted allegiance.

In Australia there is the luxury of relative affluence and the comparative advantage consumers have enjoyed over the past 10 years. This has been largely due to continued declines in unemployment and interest rates and increases in real wages, along with a sustained growth in house prices. These conditions have combined to produce a considerable rise in discretionary spending and a focus on luxury items in particular. Wine should fall comfortably into both these categories. City and inner suburban consumers are at the forefront of what is increasingly becoming a nation of wine drinkers.

But discretionary spending is not the only catalyst. The cultural explosion in restaurant offerings has also contributed. The rise in Spanish, Italian, Asian and South American restaurants has further encouraged the average suburban consumer to embrace the food and wine experience. But is this trend reinforced by the data underlying this chapter?

### *Aims*

This chapter will contribute to existing literature on wine consumption patterns by exploring purchasing decisions across 40 stratified suburbs of Australia's largest metropolitan city – Sydney. It will specifically:

1. Focus on retailer data of wine region, variety, imported and domestic preferences, and average price-points for wine by suburb income data
2. Use these data to build profiles of suburban wine drinkers
3. Highlight changing trends in wine styles across a large Australian city
4. Complement other chapters in this volume by adding to the fabric of the culture and history associated with drinking in the suburbs.

### **The Literature**

Over the past decade there has been a relatively tight portfolio of scholarly articles assessing patterns of wine purchasing.<sup>3</sup> Such studies have tended to focus on common characteristics displayed by consumers using data extracted from purchase surveys. These characteristics have been primarily based on different behavioural patterns and been commonly identified under gender, age, income, education levels, lifestyles, nationality and sometimes occupation.<sup>4</sup> Some have extended the methodology to include cultural shifts in wine consumption and the underlying sociological indicators behind consumption levels.<sup>5</sup>

Work that has moved beyond these paradigms is that by Brunner and Siegrist, which focuses on the motivation behind wine consumption, the changes in lifestyles, and levels of consumer involvement.<sup>6</sup> They speculate on motivation ranging from price-consciousness to image awareness, using hierarchical cluster analysis, providing a useful extension to previous behavioural studies. Their research is reinforced by an earlier empirical study of Johnson and Bruwer, which focuses on the Australian wine industry's embryonic market segmentation policy and its adherence to wine related lifestyle analysis.<sup>7</sup> Lee provides a uniquely Asian perspective of wine consumption behaviour by developing a theoretical framework of the effects of globalisation on this behaviour and the positive connections between economic and technological progress and Asians' more recently sophisticated palate.<sup>8</sup>

While these studies represent an impressive collection of consumer-led inquiries, the scope is limited. Samples have been restricted to demographic data analysis and consumer perceptions of quality, branding and pricing distinctions.<sup>9</sup> They have made connections with lifestyle trends and economic progress, but there has been little if any exploration of distribution data, or the connection between residential location and purchase characteristics. Similarly, they have treated their models as static entities. They have presented snapshots of current consumer behaviour without exploring the cultural fabric that may underlie such behaviour or the connection between behaviour

and place. In addition, there has been little recognition of the fluidity of wine consumption – the dramatic shifts in sentiment towards variety, producer or region that are in constant flux.

### *Methodology*

The methodology supporting this study was exploratory in nature but did investigate the author's assumptions about patterns of wine consumption in Australia. The city of Sydney was chosen as a test case to ascertain whether the diverse culture of a large metropolitan city would influence consumption patterns and thereby deviate from the average national patterns.

The exploratory aspects of the study focused on issues around demands for grape variety, wine region preferences, common price-points, preferred producers where data were available, and trends in domestic and imported wine sales. These data were then compared and contrasted with Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data detailing socio-economic advantage and disadvantage (education levels, employment rates and median household income) by suburb. Data were included to test assumptions that the level of consumer experimentation, expenditure elasticity and buyer involvement were related to socio-economic advantage/disadvantage.

The fieldwork component of the study (carried out in 2012) involved telephone surveys with liquor retailers. Retailers were chosen in preference to consumers in order to extract more objective data. Actual retail figures provide a more reliable map of consumption than do consumer memory or perceptions. The survey sample was informed by a stratified random approach. Three income-related suburban categories were chosen – those where household income was below \$55 000 per year, those where income was between \$55 000 and \$85 000, and those where median income was higher than \$85 000 per year.

There was also an effort to categorise by geographic spread to ensure the most representative sample. Within these parameters, however, suburbs were then chosen at random. A total of 40 liquor retailers were sampled. The liquor stores within each of the suburbs ranged in size from large chain shops to small, independent establishments. There was not an attempt to gain an equal representation. Rather, determination was made by the retailer's willingness to participate.

### **Findings and Discussion**

These data portray a drinking culture in a state of flux. They also appear to indicate an insecurity about taste and choice. There are a



number of elements influencing this insecurity, which are discussed below.

### *National Factors*

The Australian wine industry is currently experiencing an identity crisis. For more than a decade Australian wine has suffered a loss in valuation, brought about by changing consumer preferences and a switch to more differentiated offerings. This has led to a surplus of wine in the under \$15 price-points. The vast majority of Australia's exported wine falls into these price-points and, as such, is subject to what Brian Croser would describe as a 'race to the bottom'.<sup>10</sup> The industry has been left exposed, offering a homogeneous product to an increasingly heterogeneous international market and has, therefore, needed to compete on price rather than product.

Wine writers, journalists, judges and consumers have been critical of this homogeneity and, domestically, have turned their attention to alternatives, particularly imported wines from New Zealand, Italy, France and Chile. The mantle of producing consistent and unchallenging, pleasant wine that the Australian wine industry held perhaps somewhat arrogantly in the 1980s and 90s has been comprehensively *dismantled* in the new millennium. As a result, the home-grown wines that many Australians grew up on are now tarnished with reputations for being mediocre and bland.

A second aspect is a developing cultural antipathy towards mass-produced, cheap offerings of any sort, particularly among affluent consumers. Perhaps a perverse consequence of a more intense globalisation of production and distribution is the value consumers are now placing on localised products and services. As ubiquitous brands continue to flood markets consumers with higher discretionary incomes are seeking local, often hand-crafted products that cost more but offer a much more unique experience. A common phenomenon in such transitions, however, is the capacity to move up in price-points without necessarily the level of knowledge to direct such discretionary purchases. As such, these consumers rely on price as the single indicator of quality and differentiation, an indicator that has significant limitations.

A final factor is Australia's relative immaturity as a wine producing and consuming nation. Understanding wine as a *cultural asset* requires generations of historical markers, such as site heritage and an understanding of its significance, the connections between site and winemaking practices, wine family and community histories, and a sophisticated food and wine consumption culture. Such indicators inform an appreciation of wine's economic, political and social

fabric. Because of Australia's early history of 'hard liquor' production, followed by an entrenched devotion to beer consumption, the wine fabric is sparse and incomplete. In short, the country's consumers think of wine as a mere drink, rather than as an experience. Consumer involvement, therefore, is underdeveloped.

### *Conservative Tastes*

Within the *Vitis vinifera* grape clone there are approximately 311 red varieties/hybrids and 406 white varieties/hybrids. Yet in the suburbs of Sydney, consumers limit themselves to approximately 10 mainstream varieties or blends. The ubiquitous varieties of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Shiraz and Cabernet blends dominate this small selection and highlight its very conservative nature. But it is more than this. Because the notion of wine drinking and involvement is so new to Australia, consumers lack the confidence to experiment. They appear unsure of their ability to judge effectively and seem afraid to boldly announce their preference through purchases. Unlike the preferences shown in relation to art, music or theatre, consumers fear any scrutiny of their wine choice. This avoidance is manifested in conservative purchases of well-known varieties that do not threaten the perceptions of others. They are seen as 'safe' and acceptable.

Such conservatism is also reflected in the adherence to dominant fashions. While the Australian varieties/blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Shiraz remain popular, the most notable fashion in Australian wine over the past three years has been the New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. According to *The Australian and New Zealand Wine Industry Directory*, New Zealand is now the largest wine exporter to Australia, representing 68 per cent of all wines imported into Australia.<sup>11</sup> If the data from the Sydney suburb survey is any indication, a very large percentage of this is Sauvignon Blanc. Of the 40 suburbs surveyed in Sydney, NZ Sauvignon Blanc was the number one seller in 31 suburbs. Further, it was in the top three selling wines in all but one of the 40 suburbs.

Among the suburbs surveyed, imported wine sales over the past 12 months increased between 5 per cent and 45 per cent, with an average increase of 14 per cent. Again, the vast majority of these increases were accounted for by NZ Sauvignon Blanc (27 of the 28 suburbs that recorded an increase in imported wine sales). This compared to Australian Shiraz as one of the top three selling wines in 23 suburbs, and Australian Chardonnay as one of the top three sellers in 11 suburbs (see Table 1).

Grape Variety	Top 3 Seller Varieties Across 40 Suburbs
Sauvignon Blanc	39
Australian Shiraz	23
Australian Chardonnay	11
Pinot Noir	6
Pinot Gris/Grigio	3

Table 1: Top selling grape varieties across Sydney suburbs

The only indication of experimental purchasing occurred with Pinot Noir (one of the top three sellers in six suburbs) and Pinot Gris (one of the top three sellers in three suburbs), although both varieties are increasingly considered mainstream. There were isolated examples of Muscato, Chambourcin, Gamay, Nebbiolo and Prosecco but the level of consumer involvement was minute according to suburban wine retailers.

NZ Sauvignon Blanc is rapidly becoming an international brand. The wine region of Marlborough is responsible for most of the sales in Australia and regardless of socio-economic grouping, this is consumers' favourite wine. This is confirmed by New Zealand wine export figures that claim eight of every 10 bottles exported is Sauvignon Blanc.<sup>12</sup> Five years ago Sauvignon Blanc was perceived as somewhat exotic and only consumed by a minority of the more adventurous wine consumers. As with all fashion, however, it quickly caught on as a replacement for the prevailing Australian Chardonnay. In typical Australian fashion this offering has been further 'dumbed down' by also selling it in one-litre tetra packs. The next dominant fashion in white wines is expected to be Pinot Gris, both New Zealand and Australian varieties. Consumers are not yet confident enough to go beyond New World wines in a substantial way, perhaps partly because these wines are harder to trivialise.

### *Variety Versus Region*

There is a fundamental reason why Australian consumers are reluctant to commit to the Old World varieties of France, Italy and Spain. Australia, like the USA and New Zealand, classifies its wines by variety. When we choose wines, therefore, apart from price, we think first in varietal type. It is a somewhat simplistic, even crude method of choice, since it necessarily obscures all the nuances of site (*terroir*), region and winemaking practices. It ignores the basic facts that a Cabernet Sauvignon, or a Pinot Noir, or a Malbec will be characterised by radically different components depending on where it is grown, how it is grown, how it is made and the season in which it is grown. So from the beginning Australian wine consumers' choice is governed by a coarse set of principles that are designed to homogenise the myriad of differences that naturally occur in a winegrape.

It is a homogenisation that creates barriers to deeper understanding and interpretation of wine and its heritage.

Old World wines are characterised and classified by a very different set of criteria. If you intend to purchase a wine in France, for example, you are confronted by a whole series of regions, cru designations and chateaux. The French wine consumer learns early about the nuances of soil, microclimates, aspect and regional differentiation. In fact, individual *terroirs* and regions are classified according to perceived quality and winemaking practices. Variety is often peripheral to the region or specific *terroir* and as most winemakers in France blend their grapes into different blends, the term 'variety' is almost meaningless. Rather than an artificially simplified choice, as is the case in New World offerings, selection often requires rather intimate knowledge and understanding. The French wine consumer is part of a heterogeneous culture imbued with deep vinicultural meaning.

#### *Suburban Influences*

There are of course other socio-economic factors contributing to Australian conservatism. For example, if we look at varieties by 'suburb median household income' it is possible to make further assumptions. In those suburbs that recorded median income levels below AUD\$55 000, there were six dominant varieties consumed, including among others, Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz and Chardonnay. In the AUD\$55 000 to AUD\$85 000 suburb bracket, the number of dominant varieties rose to eight but were also dominated by the above three varieties. In the over AUD\$85 000 suburbs, the number of dominant varieties rose to nine on average and varieties such as Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris became dominant, but once again, only after Sauvignon Blanc (see Table 2).

Median Household Income	Top Selling and Number of Dominant Varieties
Under \$55,000	NZ Sauvignon Blanc
	Shiraz
	Chardonnay
	6 dominant varieties
\$55,000 - \$85,000	NZ Sauvignon Blanc
	Shiraz
	Chardonnay
	8 dominant varieties
Over \$85,000	NZ Sauvignon Blanc
	Pinot Noir
	Pinot Gris
	9 dominant varieties

Table 2: Top selling and number of dominant varieties by median household income

This data indicates that there is very little association between income level and experimentation/involvement in wine purchasing within the Sydney suburban landscape.

The income data in this study is supported by ABS data that ranks suburbs by education levels and occupation.<sup>13</sup> The suburb ranking for median income corresponds neatly with suburb ranking for education and unemployment data, but provides little consistency between socio-economic advantage and disadvantage and involvement levels in wine purchasing. The data, therefore, do not reflect theories put forward by such academics as Gbadamosi, highlighting the connections between income and consumer involvement in product purchases.<sup>14</sup> The Australian situation is not nearly as definitive as the Finish, UK or Swedish models.

While these data differentiate between suburbs in terms of socio-economic conditions and involvement, they also show that even at the highest income levels, involvement, although higher than the average, is still relatively low in absolute terms. When you consider that the above AUD\$85 000 suburbs are primarily purchasing the staples of Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, red blends, Merlot, and in a couple of cases, Champagne, then it is safe to assume that Australians remain relatively conservative in their wine purchases. This returns us to this article's original hypothesis that Australia's history of liquor consumption has left a legacy of inexperience and discomfort with the many *Vitis vinifera* grape clones.

A much clearer picture of wine consumption can be presented using suburb income data with wine purchases by price-points. At the broadest level of analysis, the data show an average 63.5 per cent of wine sales across all Sydney suburbs were made in the under \$15 price-point. In the \$15 to \$25 price points the average was 23.8 per cent and in the over \$40 price-points, a mere 3.3 per cent (see table 3). The above pattern is typical of wine sales globally and, in fact, shows a substantial increase on Australia's export values.<sup>15</sup>

Price - Points	Percentage of Sales
Under \$15	63.5
\$15-\$15	23.8
Over \$40	3.3

Table 3: Percentage of wine sales by price-point

If we look at how these price-points are distributed across particular suburbs we see a strong association with median income, employment levels and education. For example, in the under \$55 000 income suburb, which also recorded among the lowest employment and education levels, the < \$15 price-point recorded an average 76 per cent of sales, as opposed to the overall suburb average of 63.5 per cent. In the over \$40 price-points these same suburbs recorded an average of 1.5 per cent of sales, as opposed to the overall suburb average of 3.3 per cent.

Among the highest income suburbs, over \$85 000, the under \$15 price-points only accounted for 45.6 per cent of sales, as opposed to the overall average of 63.5 per cent. By contrast the above \$40 price-points accounted for 9.3 per cent, as opposed to the average of 3.3 per cent.

There were some unexplained outlier suburbs. These did not conform to expectations and did not show any association with income, employment or education levels. Examples included Lurnea (\$48 452) and Warragamba (\$51 997). They both recorded only 40 per cent of sales in the under \$15 price-points but 5 per cent and 10 per cent respectively in the over \$40 price-points. Both these sets of figures are right outside their sector average. At the other end of the scale we see similar anomalies in two suburbs recording above \$85 000 median income. McMahon's Point (\$107 429) and Lane Cove (\$92 918) recorded 70 per cent and 85 per cent of sales respectively in the under \$15 price-points (opposed to 63.5 per cent) and each recorded only 1 per cent of sales in the above \$40 price-points. Again, both were significant outliers to their sector average. It would be a valuable study that identified the factors behind such patterns.

Apart from these exceptions, however, there was a close conformity between socio-economic advantage and higher price-points of wine purchase, an indicator of relatively high discretionary income and a willingness to devote it to luxury goods, even if not particularly involved in these purchases.

### *A Sense of Place and Regional Identity*

When assessing data relating to preferred wine regions there are only a few clear indicators. This in itself shows confusion among consumers and will be discussed further on. The clearest trends are that regardless of the suburb's level of socio-economic advantage the preferred regions by a significant margin remain Marlborough in New Zealand and the Barossa Valley in South Australia. This tends to confirm the earlier discussion about the Australian consumer's lack of confidence in wine purchases, and reluctance to experiment. Regardless of income and education levels, the ubiquitous Marlborough region remains the outstanding choice for wine. The Barossa Valley of South Australia is one of Australia's oldest and most well-known wine regions and was dominant as far back as the 1970s, when consumers first began their wine experiments in earnest. Little has changed. It remains the safe option for consumers who tend to be unaware of their options and possess little knowledge of regional wine identity.

One data surprise, however, which again confuses the picture, is the fact that both the lowest income and the highest income suburbs displayed relatively limited diversity in their choice of region. By far the most experimental suburbs in terms of geographical spread were the middle-income suburbs. The lowest income suburbs recorded a total of eight wine regions from which they purchase. The highest income suburbs recorded only nine regions. The middle-income suburbs, however, recorded 14 regions of choice.

Middle-income suburbs experimented with regions such as the Grampians in Victoria, the Clare Valley in South Australia, the Tamar Valley in Tasmania, Otago in New Zealand and Adelaide Hills in South Australia. For the Australian consumer these regions are not yet seen as 'mainstream' and provide an interesting contour to the consumption map.

High-income suburbs, while not demonstrating a great diversity of regional choice, did demonstrate a willingness to venture outside the Australian/New Zealand orbit with regions such as Provence, Burgundy, Bordeaux and Champagne. But again, this may reflect capacity to purchase in these price points rather than informed experimentation. These four regions are among the most well-known of France and merely represent another 'mainstream' alternative.

## So Does Money Buy Knowledge?

It appears from the above data that in Australia neither high incomes nor education/employment have a noticeable influence on wine knowledge or experimentation. The only noticeable indicator in this survey is that high incomes simply provide the capacity to purchase more expensive labels within the same varietal, regional and brand categories. And this is a significant finding. The Australian consumer, in fact, has relatively very few trusted choices in wine. Consumers demonstrate a reluctance to move beyond these choices even when their capacity to do so increases. In terms of wine variety there is a strident conservatism across all socio-economic bands. In terms of regional sourcing the conservatism is less strident but still apparent. Despite the myriad of wine shows, newspaper features and general wine education that has taken place across the country over the past two decades, there is little evidence that these have filtered into the Australian wine consumer's consciousness. They have only served to move them up in price-points.

What do these data tell us at a deeper level? The data reveal a couple of substantial finds. Largely these findings confirm the author's previous assumptions about wine consumption patterns – that Australia is a nation of conservative wine drinkers who show little inclination or knowledge for experimentation, are relatively uninvolved in their purchases, and are insecure about their choices. The fact that this survey reveals such findings within the nation's largest metropolitan city, where cultural diversity dominates, is particularly significant.

But why is this the case? It is suggested that the reasons are woven into the way Australians think about wine – what it means to them. By international standards our wine industry is relatively immature. Its history dates back a mere 160 years and for much of that history it was not table wine but the fortified variety that preoccupied its makers and consumers. Unlike in France, Italy or Spain, wine is not woven into the very fabric of society. It is not embedded in the national consciousness in the same manner, or understood on the same terms.

Many of Australia's Old World peers view their wines as cultural assets, things to be treasured, even revered, as consumers embrace their unique histories and stories. Australians, both makers and consumers of wine, more often than not think of wine as a simple commodity, like beer or coca-cola – something to be massed produced and mass consumed.

It has only been over the past 30 years that Australian wine has matured and been viewed as an elegant table accompaniment, capable of being more than the fortified or bulk (bladder) product it



was previously. Yet in this same period the vast majority of wine's family owned and operated companies were absorbed by global beverage corporations. Unfortunately, such companies thought largely in terms of streamlined production, standardization and large distribution chains. They introduced large-scale planting regimes, simplified and standardized the winemaking process, sourced grapes from multiple regions and mass marketed the final product. In short, they industrialised winemaking in Australia.

Like soft drink manufacturing, winemaking in Australia rapidly became a production-line process. When a product is diminished and trivialised to this extent, the place it occupies in the consumer's mind also diminishes. Consumers were trained to think of their wines as easy-to-drink, non-challenging products that were uniform in style and flavour and which demanded little interaction. Often their histories and sense of place were obscured or even removed. After all, the 'wine from everywhere is the wine from nowhere'. It became increasingly difficult to identify wine by its unique *terroir*, its local community, or its particular history and message when these were in constant flux.

Further to this was the Australian preference for identifying wines by their varietal make-up, rather than by the particular place in which the grapes were grown. Australian wines were labelled by the terms Shiraz or Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay or Semillion rather than by their local sites of growth and history. The wine-buying public was being taught to ignore wine's individual characteristics and individual heritages, and to think only in terms of grape variety. Such a thinking process necessarily smothers differentiation or respect for that differentiation.

And finally, from the early 1970s, the Australian wine industry has been operating under a rigorous scientific paradigm. By this I mean that, like California, Australia actively rejected wine's Old World traditions of soil selection, handcrafting and artisanship. Australians did not, and still don't to a large extent, understand or respect the importance of *terroir*. The critical elements of unique soil, aspect, microclimate and harmony with the land were ignored in the pursuit of efficient production along scientific principles. Wine moved from the soil to the laboratory, where it was manipulated and pre-fabricated to fit particular demands.

The Australian consumer has been denied their individual experience with wine. They have been denied its cultural significance and the magical qualities it can reveal. They have become homogenous consumers of (in Australia) a homogenous product. And because of this, wine's mysteries remain hidden.

# AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

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## Chapter 9: Liquid Desire

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