



life by the drop

Benchmarking reds

John Griffiths certainly picked a day to show his reds alongside some of the nation's best.



■ John Griffiths

It was a dismal wet Sunday, with winds strong enough to blow the spots off a dalmatian dog, but 60 Faber Vineyard guests didn't give a damn, as they settled in the Baskerville winery's barrel room to tackle some delightful red wines.

Benchmarking wines, where a winery shows its wines with a number of similar premium quality wines from other makers for assessment and comments, has become a tour de force in the wine industry. All wines on this day were from the 2009 vintage and they were in three brackets of four, a mix of cabernet sauvignon and shiraz, pre-poured and unidentified. John "Griffo" conducts his tasting a little differently from others. He gets winemakers, judges and scribes to comment on the wines after each bracket, but also actively involves all attendees in the discussion, which is refreshing, and at times entertaining.

Some of us are too serious about wine and pontificate about it and though at times that's acceptable, it is a beverage that should generally be treated as fun. In the first bracket wines ranged from \$38 to \$130 a bottle, Faber's Frankland River Cabernet Sauvignon was the least expensive and handled itself very

well against esteemed company.

The second bracket was Faber-free and contained my wine of the day, the Happs Three Hills Shiraz. Griffo's flagship wine, Faber Reserve Shiraz (\$48) in the third bracket performed creditably along with industry jewels, Mount Langi Ghiran "Langi" Shiraz (\$105) and Rockford Basket Press Shiraz (\$95).

Faber 2009 Reserve Shiraz

A black purple colour with an amazingly concentrated dried-fruit Christmas cake character and lots of warm rich plummy mouthfeel across the palate.

A big, honest, up-front, strong wine, not unlike the winemaker himself.

■ Score 17.5. \$48

Three Hills 2009 Shiraz

Made by Mark Warren at Happs in Margaret River, this is black mauve to the rim of the glass and full of red fruit - mulberry and raspberry and has a depth of sweet vanillin oak, sandy tannins and wonderful persistence along the palate.

■ Score 18.5. \$55

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Rod Properjohn for
LIQUOR BARONS
TASTING PANEL