

Winemakers encouraged to challenge new horizons

■ By Mark Osborne

SHIRAZ and cabernet sauvignon are prominent Australian varieties but the emergence of others has winemakers excited.

David Franz Winery grapegrower and winemaker David Lehmann, from the Barossa Valley, says exploring new varieties and styles is what winemaking is all about.

Although David's flagship wines are cabernet sauvignon and shiraz, he has an adventurous streak and says he would try anything once.

"I heard about a guy who attempted to make a cabernet riesling rose; it didn't work, but I thought, 'interesting idea'," he said.

New varieties of most interest to David because of the regional terroir are tempranillo, zinfandel and sangiovese.

"The most important thing is to make a wine in a style that suits the region. It would be no good trying to make a soft elegant pinot noir in the Barossa, but a big gutsy pinot might just work," he said.

"Making wine is about doing it in your own special way."

In terms of introducing new varieties into a region or vineyard, the clones are all important.

David uses South Africa as an example. "They had the climate and soil but the old cabernet sauvignon clone they introduced was a shocker," he said.

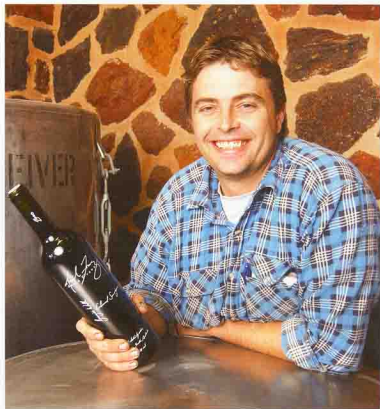
"This is where Australia has a real advantage; you can go down to your local vine improvement centre and ask them what they have, and get good clones," he said.

New varieties are exciting, but he is equally as excited at working with old varieties and finding new ways to express them.

Just down the road is Langmeil, where winemaker Paul Lindner is re-exploring grenache.

Langmeil's Fifth Wave Grenache is sourced from a 60-year-old vineyard in Lyndoch that is dry grown, low yielding and produces very intense fruit.

"I think the quality of grenache is very vineyard dependent. We



David Lehmann says Australian winemakers should embrace new varieties as a way to enhance the industry.

are lucky to have fruit that produces a very big, intense style of wine," Paul said.

He would like to work with several different varieties but he points out that commercial reality limits opportunities.

"By producing more wines, you take up more space on the wine store shelf, and with some varieties it takes several years before the vines start producing suitable fruit," Paul said.