



Would you like snails with your semillon?

AS WHITE wines go, semillon may not have the appeal of chardonnay nor the trendiness of viognier, but it remains one of Australia's few classics.

The Hunter Valley or, more accurately, the lower Hunter, is recognised as our leading producer of world-class semillon.

Hunter vigneron Bruce Tyrrell says semillon has many charms, from its low alcohol to its natural affinity with seafood and its ability to age and develop complex layers of flavour.

"Hunter semillon is one of my favourite wines in the world and is one of the few wines where Australia sets a benchmark for the style."

British wine doyen Jancis Robinson has hailed Hunter semillon as "Australia's great gift to the world". *Wine Spectator* ranked it as the nation's greatest white wine.

For those keen to gain a better understanding of this viticultural treasure, the Hunter Semillon and

Seafood Festival (April 18-20) is a great place to start.

In its seventh year, the festival will showcase 150 Hunter semillons and meltingly good seafood prepared by local chefs. Cooking demonstrations by Justin North of Be-casse restaurant and TV presenter/chef Peter Howard are scheduled.

Rowena Hawkins, from the Hunter Valley Vineyard Association, says the festival will have casual farmhouse-style lunches, vertical tastings, degustation dinners, educational workshops, cheeses, olive oils and live entertainment.

She suggests the best way to get to grips with semillon is to enrol in one of the masterclasses on April 19. Each will have a panel of winemakers and six semillons to taste and compare.

One of the quirkier offerings will be escargot, supplied by Helen and Robert Dyball. Their business, Snails Bon Appetite, supplies snails throughout Australia.

Helen Dyball says growers follow

strict farming guidelines to ensure healthy, chemical-free snails.

She believes resistance to eating escargot is mind over matter.

Their texture is similar to squid.

A paella of snails, peas, chicken and chorizo was prepared by Hunter chefs Andrew Clark (Rock Restaurant) and Andy Wright (The Cellar Restaurant).

The verdict? The snails ably complemented, rather than dominated, the other ingredients for a delicious twist to the Spanish dish.

The Dyballs say they plan to start supplying gourmet gastropods to Dubai and would one day love to crack the French market.

Matt Dillow from Calais Estate's restaurant will present a snail linguini dish as part of the festival.

Bon appetite!

For more information go to www.huntersemillonandseafood.com.au or ph: (02) 4991 4533. The author was a guest of the Hunter Valley Vineyard Association. AAP



Classic: tasting session at the Hunter Semillon and Seafood Festival.