



# The Wine Angel

by Baroness Sberi de Borchgrave

SPREADING THE GOOD WORD ABOUT AUSTRALIAN WINES

The wine world is under attack—not from teetotalers or the forces of anti-globalization, but filmmaking cameras and crews. The Golden Globe-winning *Sideways* spanked merlot and sent wine amateurs into pinot noir's embrace. Jonathan Nossiter's documentary *Mondovino*, another wine-focused film, skewered a far larger swath of international wines—turning an unflattering spotlight on conglomerate producers while celebrating the endangered small family chateau.

Like an oenophile *Fabrenheit 9-11*, *Mondovino* makes its black and white case without much room for nuance. Wine critics, consultants, big famous wines—no one is spared. According to the film, a conspiracy's at play involving imperial critic Robert Parker Jr., globetrotting consultant Michel Rolland, the ad-rich *Wine Spectator* and wineries like Mondavi, Antinori and Mouton Rothschild.

They're out to manipulate our tastes, says the filmmaker. Rolland creates them. Parker rates them. Consumers drive up the price.

On the flipside stands the humble family producer, close to their grapes and close to their land. In Nossiter's film, they are honest, hard working, devoted not to money but wine. Small producers are good, says the film, while big conglomerates are very, very bad.

While *Mondovino* makes a powerful case, I don't buy its tidy conspiracy theories. Powerful global players have brought great wine to a much larger audience. Of course, I'm all for standing up for the underdog, which is why I seek out small production wines whenever I can and why I'm so glad there are importers, like Australian Michele Anderson, devoted to doing the same.

Based in Manhattan and Southampton, Anderson—who, appropriately enough,



**Angel in America** | In a world dominated by wine conglomerates, Michele Anderson, an Australian importer based in New York and Southampton, is bent on changing Americans' perceptions of Australian wines. Dubbing herself the "Wine Angel," she is the champion for the country's small production wineries. See Resources.

calls herself the "Wine Angel"—has built a business on introducing small Australian producers to the American market. Facing down the big boys has been an uphill battle; her mission is to change the American image of most Aussie wine.

"In Australia, 85 percent of the wine is owned and controlled by four companies," she says. "They are brand machines...playing the brand globalization game. What they import to America is not what we drink in Australia. We don't even get Yellow Tail. It's a brand created for export, just like Outback Steakhouse."

Anderson launched her import business about two years ago. "My wines represent a different side of Australia. I choose them for their restrained elegance and finesse. They're food wines." So far she's purposefully kept her business

small—the portfolio includes seven brands with about 20 wines. Her wines, mostly from cool climate areas, are all flagships in their regions.

"Though I like all my 'children,' I have a little partiality for my Tasmanian wines from Moorilla Estate," she admits. "The cool climate with its longer growing season really makes for wines with subtlety and grace."

Anderson also touts the wines she sells from the Mornington Peninsula in rural Victoria. "Mornington Peninsula is very much like the Hamptons," she says. Tuck's Ridge, based in the area, produces chardonnay and pinot noir in a Burgundian style, while nearby Callanans Road uses organic grapes. Sally's Paddock is the Wine Angel's real cult wine. "It's an Oz icon," she says. With only 2,000 cases produced a year, the cabernet/shiraz blend is intense without being overwhelming. 100 Tree Hill is the label's second brand, with grapes grown at altitudes of 1,500 feet.

Finally from Rutherglen, Victoria's most sun-drenched region, Pfeiffer (and its second brand, Three Chimneys) gets top notices for its sweet dessert wines—"stickies" they call them Down Under. The muscat is the most celebrated, though Pfeiffer's riesling is also charming as is its fruity Marsanne.

Over a dinner of oysters and soft-shell crabs at The Coast Grill on Noyac Road, the Wine Angel and I worked our way through several light Moorilla chardonnays. Afterwards, with our fish, we sipped Moorilla's velvety pinot, finishing at dessert, with a silky Pfeiffer muscat. We raised our glasses and made a toast to the small producers of the world and their highly individual wines. "To *Mondovino*," we drank.