

# Chrismont: back on its feet and looking good

**Rick Allen**

CHRISTMAS, a time of relaxation and joy? Try telling that to the winemaking team at Chrismont and you may well finish with a bottle of riesling tipped over your head. Cheers!

Chrismont is a mid-sized winery – and a very good one – at the southern end of the picturesque King Valley, with quite magnificent views from the cellar door, and a couple of spoilt labradors who come up to greet you as you arrive.

But two years ago disaster struck and, even now, the pain lingers.

It started with two devastating frosts (one early in the season, and another one late) which did significant damage to the 250 acres (101 hectares) of vines.

Then there was the ongoing drought that showed no sign of easing. It was so bad that on December 1 tighter water restriction would mean there was to be no water for irrigation.

But even that wasn't the end of it. On that very day – December 1 – the bushfires that ravaged northern Victoria hit and, for the next 45 days, the valley was choked with dense, black smoke.

Some of the vines survived okay, but the damage was done. The grapes were sent away for testing and they had all suffered from smoke taint.



Chrismont is in the picturesque King Valley.

The end result was no vintage. Not a drop. The cost? "I'd hate to think, it's not a pleasant subject," says marketing manager Tyce Light.

A ballpark figure? "Twelve-and-a-half thousand cases at \$20 a bottle, give or take."

As my bank manager will attest, I'm not a mathematician but that's \$3 million right there. But now, two years later, things are starting to pick up.

The 2008 vintage is wowing the critics – and I can see why.

I tried the La Zona pinot grigio (\$22) the other night and it's a ripper, with pear and apple flavours, and lovely crisp acid.

## NEXT WEEK

■ Christmas is around the corner. In next week's column we'll look at some good buys – both cheapies and more expensive wines – to help you through the holiday season.

Chrismont has two ranges of wines. The La Zona range has a strong Mediterranean connection (five reds, three whites and a rose), while the standard Chrismont range has the more common Australian varietals.

One recent addition to the La Zona range is albarino (\$22), which has citrus and almond flavours, and which was recently named in the top 100 wines at the Sydney Wine show.

This is a really good winery that's overdue for some Christmas cheer.

Splash out, give them a go. I'd start with the riesling, which is always very good (\$16), and the pinot grigio. Both are ideal for the hotter weather.