

## **Young Winemaker of the Year Goes with a Swing!**

*On Friday night Wine Society Members and their guests joined staff and major players from the Australian and New Zealand wine industries to see the 2011 Young Winemaker of the Year crowned – and to enjoy a spectacular night out.*

Another Friday night, another evening by the harbour. It's fair to say that Sydneysiders are so blessed when it comes to spectacular backdrops for their entertainment that it's easy to become a little blasé. It takes a special night out and a special location to make a real impression on this tough crowd. And when 250 wine lovers from Sydney (not to mention a fair few canny visitors from around Australia) descended on Darling Harbour's Coast Restaurant and Bar that is exactly what they got.

'You're not as old as you thought you were' our invitations told us (a reference to the increased aged limit for Young Winemaker of the Year entrants) and it was a theme that was to run throughout **The Wine Society Young Winemaker of the Year Gala Evening**. Gone was the black tie formality and sit-down meal of previous years, replaced by an altogether more relaxed and youthful 'cocktail style' evening.

But the informal glamour of the glorious rooftop setting, the sparkling harbour views and even the exquisite and decidedly moreish canapés were just part of an impressive supporting cast. It was the wines and their creators that were the real stars of the show.

Once all the guests had arrived we were introduced to this year's ten finalists by Gillian Hyde, the Wine Society's Head of Membership and our MC for the night. The formalities over, we were invited to taste their wines, and so the serious (and seriously enjoyable) business of the evening began. Guests revelled in the freedom to flit between wine stations, chat with winemakers, hit the dance floor and generally get into the party spirit.

Starting my own personal wine journey with the Jim Barry Wines Lodge Hill Riesling 2011 made by Luke Steele was a mixed blessing. So beautifully did its crisp acidity and citrus palate complement the perfectly shucked and deliciously creamy Sydney Rock oysters that it was extremely hard to move on. But having finally prised myself away, I discovered another fabulous wine and perfectly matched canapé at every station. Highlights were many – no one knows how to match food and wine quite like the Wine Society – but those that live longest in the memory were the delicate flavours of a wonderfully fresh kingfish crudo paired with the pure intensity of the Seppelt Drumborg Vineyard Chardonnay 2008 and the honey/marmalade sweetness and cleansing acidity of the Orlando Wines Gramps Botrytis Semillon 2008, which together with the creamy saltiness of the Cashel Blue cheese proved a match made in heaven.

By the time we were called back inside for the announcement of the winners, all the guests had had ample opportunity to try all the wines and pick their personal favourites. So the excitement was palpable as once more Gillian took to the stage, this time with last year's winner Anna Pooley, to put the nervous finalists out of their misery. And the results certainly didn't disappoint, with Jo Marsh pulling off the unprecedented feat of taking out both the Sommeliers' Choice and the Members' Choice awards with her Seppelt Drumborg Vineyard Chardonnay, and Dan Swincer winning the big prize of Young Winemaker of the Year for his fabulously seductive Gramps Botrytis Semillon.

With results announced, all that was left was to congratulate the winners (and indeed all the finalists), go back to our favourite wine stations, celebrate the winemakers and enjoy the fruits of their labours until all too soon the clock struck midnight and it was time for carriages. Some party goers headed home for a much needed rest, others headed out into the Sydney night to continue the celebrations. And two extremely skilled winemakers left with trophies in their hands and big smiles on their faces, their talents recognised and their already extremely bright futures looking just that little bit brighter.