



## SMOKE AND TERROIRS

**After the catastrophic bushfire season saw major damage to winemaking regions across Australia, Sydney-based distillers and breweries have stepped in to take on smoke-tainted wine grapes for use in experimental, collaborative projects.**

“It was clear right from the start there was a unique opportunity and desire to help growers who had suffered a massive loss,” says Christina Tulloch, chief executive of Tulloch Wines and president of the Hunter Valley Wine & Tourism Association. Compounded by climate change following months of record-breaking drought and temperatures, the summer’s bushfires devastated 1500 hectares of vineyards, with more crops tainted by smoke beyond fire-affected areas. In the Hunter Valley, up to 90 per cent of crops were wiped out and the remaining grapes were so smoke-damaged that winemakers abandoned entire vintages.

Smoke taint makes grapes virtually unusable for winemaking, but other processing methods used for spirits and beer can curb those defects. Collaborating with Sydney-based Archie Rose Distilling Co., Tulloch helped source 48,000 litres of smoke-tainted cabernet and shiraz grapes from the Hunter Valley.

PHOTOGRAPHY GEORGIA GOLD (BRUNCH IN MELBOURNE), NIKKI TO (ARCHIE ROSE).



**Brunch in Melbourne is a new cookbook from the charity OnePlate, with 130 recipes from cafés such as Liminal, Tivoli Road Bakery, Matcha Mylkbak, St Ali and Cibi. All profits from sales go towards sustainable food security projects overseas. \$59.95, [oneplate.co](http://oneplate.co)**

“This project absolutely threw the growers a lifeline,” says Tulloch. The distillery transformed the grapes into a shiraz-based eau de vie; a brandy (now ageing in old bourbon barrels for three years); and a forthcoming spirit.

“Smoke can carry all different kinds of flavours – burnt, ashy or the nice, peaty flavours you might see in a whisky,” says Archie Rose senior distiller Trynt Xavier. He worked closely with First Creek Wines’ Liz Silkman to craft the fruit-driven end products – the eau de vie, for example, has a palate of tropical fruit and a light smokiness. “It took a lot of research, but we’re happy we were able to separate the good from the bad.”

Yulli’s Brews turned 700 kilos of smoke-tainted grapes from Gilbert Family Wines’ Mudgee vineyard into a beer-wine hybrid. “It’s tasting brilliant, with a lot of the easier drinking flavours you get from a beer, and some really nice red-wine tannin,” says head brewer Tom Davies of the co-ferment, which is set for release this summer. Combining the crushed grapes – skins and all – with a beer base for the first fermentation, the mixture was later transferred to oak barrels for nine months of ageing, much like maturing a wine.

Fire events have damaged \$400 million worth of wine grapes here since 2003. “We want to make a point of how terrible this year’s been for all the winemakers affected,” says Davies. “In the times we live in, everyone’s going to have to learn to pivot a little bit more.” **ALECIA WOOD**



**Clockwise from top left: Archie Rose senior distiller Trynt Xavier; Archie Rose’s Hunter Valley Shiraz Spirit.**