

Vintage times for Tasmania

By Graeme Phillips



Grape vines are tough, adaptable things and grow in all sorts of climates from just two degrees off the equator in Brazil to far northern China, where they survive freezing winters. In the complex matrix of environmental elements that influence the styles and quality of wines, the most important determinant is temperature and the world's best wines have traditionally come from present-day cool-to-temperate climates.

According to experts at a Conference on Climate Change and Wine held recently in Barcelona, it's these cooler-climate wines, among the most famous in the world, which will change beyond recognition over the next 50 years as global warming makes grapes bigger, riper, less balanced and sweeter.

Dr Richard Smart, one of the world's leading viticultural experts, went further by predicting that many of today's classic wines and renowned temperate European wine regions might simply disappear altogether. At the same time, the consultant to Tamar Ridge Estates in northern Tasmania said such southern hemisphere wine regions as Tasmania, New Zealand, Chile and Argentina will be less affected because of their smaller land masses and larger surrounding areas of cooling oceans. In their reports on the conference, newspapers like *The Los Angeles Times* interpreted the experts' comments as elevating Tasmania to become one of the world's foremost premium wine regions in the future.

Whatever that future might hold, the exceptional long, hot summer across southern Australia this year has certainly proven a boon for Tasmanian wine-makers. Vintage 2008 has come with a rush. Everything is ripening at once; crop estimates of a few months ago are coming in almost double; and the crush looks like setting a record at around 9,000 tonnes. At least one contract winemaker has had to urgently order additional tanks and a larger crusher to handle the volume of grapes arriving day and night from all round the State.

"While it's a little too early to be definitive," said Tamar Ridge CEO and Chief Winemaker, Dr Andrew Pirie, "the fruit is all clean, with good ripe flavours and the right sugar and acid levels. Unlike the last big vintage in 2004, there's been plenty of sunshine this year to bring the grapes to full ripeness. So it's looking good."

Steve Lubiana at Granton says the dry, sunny weather has resulted in a very early vintage. "It's proving a cracker year", he said. "Flavours developed early and acids have held up well. So the analytical numbers and pH of the juices are terrific, much better than last year. Vine canopies have also remained green and healthy, allowing much better flavour development, with great colour in the reds and excellent ripe tannins."

French winemaker Alain Rousseau, at Hood Wines in the Coal River Valley, echoes Lubiana in saying the colours of the pinot noirs he's seen so far have been *fantastique*. "There's so much colour and flavour concentration in the skins that the pinots should be fabulous," he said. "Rousseau added that another promising result of the warm autumn was that sauvignon blanc and pinot gris are showing more lifted aromatics and fruit flavours at much lower baume levels (a measure of grape sugar and potential alcohol) than normal. "This looks like being one of our best years ever," he said.

At Freycinet Vineyard, on the East Coast, wine-maker Claudio Redenti said crop levels had been slightly above average, flavours had developed well under strong canopies and he's cautiously optimistic that it's all going to be very good.

So, it seems we can look forward to some excellent 2008 wines from around the State. The aromatic and unwooded whites will be ready in the run-up to Christmas, with the chardonnays and reds starting to appear in mid-2009. But, as Radenti said, "You never really know what you've got until the wines have finished fermentation and are safely tucked away in barrels. And then it's a matter of waiting."

Here's hoping.

Tassie taste for Danes



World famous chef and Brand Tasmania Ambassador, Tetsuya Wakuda, will showcase Tasmanian produce when he oversees a glittering Copenhagen dinner supported by Crown Prince Frederick and Crown Princess Mary this month. Organised by the Foundation to Promote Danish

Gastronomy, the gala event will introduce many of Denmark's leading chefs to Tasmanian products such as ocean trout, fine table wines, leatherwood honey, fresh vegetables and walnuts.

Tetsuya and his equally famous Spanish colleague, Sergi Arola, will, in effect, conduct an orchestra of chefs on Wednesday, 14 May during one of the peak events on Copenhagen's social calendar. The dinner for 100 guests, including Crown Prince Frederick, will be staged in the city's finest restaurant, Noma, rated in the world's top 10. The two super chefs will also run master classes for leading local chefs during their visit to the Danish capital. Tetsuya and Sergi Arola, who operates a Madrid restaurant, El Bulli, that has been rated No 1 in the world for the past three years, are regarded as the co-founders of *Fusion Cuisine*, which blends the best of European and Asian culinary traditions.

Meanwhile, Tetsuya's Sydney restaurant has again been included in the world's top 10 on the S. Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants List.

Tetsuya's was ranked ninth in 2008, after being given fifth place in 2007 and fourth on earlier occasions.

For the third successive year, Sergi Arola's El Bulli topped the world-wide poll of industry experts. Britain's The Fat Duck was second, with France's Pierre Gagnaire, Spain's Mugaritz and the French Laundry in the U.S. rounding out the top five. Two other Spanish restaurants made it into the top 10. The only other Australian restaurant to feature in the list of 50 was Sydney's Rockpool, at number 49.

The Top 10

1. El Bulli (Spain)
2. The Fat Duck (Britain)
3. Pierre Gagnaire (France)
4. Mugaritz (Spain)
5. The French Laundry (U.S.)
6. Per Se (U.S.)
7. Bras (France)
8. Arzak (Spain)
9. Tetsuya's (Australia)
10. Noma (Denmark)

Ginseng is just the tonic

Tasmania is climatically ideal for the cultivation of ginseng, a product with 5,000 years of history and a global retail market approaching \$5 billion, according to pioneer Deloraine grower Ziggy Pyka. "We believe Tasmania could become a premium ginseng producer with potential to service niche markets in Australia and overseas," he said. Pyka's company, 41 Degrees South Ginseng, harvested its first research crop recently after 12 years of R&D.



Ginseng is the common name for a number of deciduous, perennial, forest plants belonging to the genera *Panax* and *Eleutherococcus*.

They occur in the wild in northern Asia and North America. Ginseng means 'man-root' or 'man-essence' in Mandarin. The Latin word *Panax* translates as 'panacea' or 'cure-all' and that is the clue to the crop's extraordinary value. The so-called *king of herbal medicines* was probably first used as a food and only later for its tonic and healing properties. While the roots are traditionally the main commercial product, other plant parts are also exploited for medicinal use. Ginseng-derived products include fresh roots, whole dried roots (sun-dried, steamed, sugared or skinless), capsules of dried product, instant tea granules, bottled tonics, soft drinks, soups, wines, candies, and various herbal and cosmetic preparations.

China, where the ginseng root has been used in traditional medicine for at least 5,000 years, is the major market and also the biggest exporter. Australia imports more than 30 tonnes of ginseng products a year at an estimated cost of more than \$5 million. Most imported ginseng is in processed forms - usually tablets, capsules or tonics.

Ziggy and Angelika Pyka moved to Tasmania from Western Australia in 1996 with the specific goal of developing a ginseng farm to grow both Asian and American ginseng. The crop, which takes six years to mature, can be produced by three methods: planting in natural forests; planting in 'semi-wild' conditions under trees; or through intensive farming under artificial shade, such as shade-cloth. The Pykas estimate an average return of \$100 a kilo, but prices range up to \$300 a kilo and a single wild-grown tuber that mirrors the human form can fetch up to \$100,000 in Hong Kong. As well as export replacement opportunities, there is unsatisfied demand in export markets for fresh and dried ginseng, as well as for value-added ginseng products.

Having identified Tasmania as an ideal growing environment, the Pykas bought land at Westbury to begin their R&D. "To grow ginseng commercially you need to simulate the herb's natural environment," Ziggy said. "I planted, chopped down and replanted hundreds of trees as we tried to get the right combination at Westbury. We knew short-lived trees would ultimately leave gaps in the canopy as they died allowing too much sunlight through [ginseng prefers 80-90 per cent shade]. We settled on a selection of alder, ash, beech and a few poplars and oaks and added a great deal of shade cloth to increase cover while the trees were maturing."

Eventually, the Westbury crop was thriving, but the project was out-growing the property. The Pykas bought a larger property in Deloraine where they could operate a salmon farm, for immediate cash flow, while the ginseng project was developing. The 9-year-old plants were moved successfully and a commercial-style farm established. "The Tasmanian environment is good for this crop," Ziggy said. "We don't use chemicals and our plants develop very high levels of ginsenosides, which are the active ingredient in the root. Ginsenosides are beneficial for blood pressure, vision, memory and the health of internal organs. They lift your immune system to a different level. The more potent the ginseng, the more valuable it is."

Ginseng has a nutty, slightly bitter taste. It can be eaten raw or dried, used as a food additive or added to tea. It is a popular ingredient in Asian confectionary.

"The next stage for 41 Degrees South Ginseng is to bring in a commercial crop, which we expect to do within the next two years," Ziggy said. "We're working on some value-added concepts which we plan to have ready at the same time as the raw material becomes available. Then we'll be looking at full commercialisation and the establishment of Tasmania as a premium ginseng producer."

For more information: Ziggy Pyka, Managing Director of 41 Degrees South Ginseng (03) 6362 4130, or www.41southtasmania.com



Young baritone on a roll

Tasmanian audiences rarely have an opportunity to see full-scale opera in their home towns, but when Melbourne Opera staged Puccini's *La Boheme* at Hobart's Theatre Royal in April, locals also had the rare pleasure of seeing one of their own shine. Baritone Michael Lampard, 22, received a rousing reception for his pivotal role in the romantic tragedy.



During two Hobart performances, Lampard not only sang with clarity, revealing the unique character of his voice, he also showed a talent for acting and comic timing. The scenes in which Lampard played the young bohemian, Schaunard, helped establish the opera's thread of humour, which contrasts with and emphasises its tragic ending. Lampard's entrance was popular with the audience and his performance received enthusiastic bravos at the final curtain.

La Boheme was one in a string of opportunities for the up-and-coming Tasmanian. Lampard auditioned for the role when Melbourne Opera brought *The Barber of Seville* to Hobart late last year and sang in the show at Melbourne's Athenaeum Theatre at the beginning of March. "I accepted the role without hesitation," Lampard said. "It's a wonderful part for a young baritone, because the range isn't hard. There is some good stuff to sing, but there is not a huge amount. It's a real ensemble opera so everyone gets a go. But that means you really have to concentrate on coming in at the right time and reacting in the right way. People get caught up in the melodies, but it is an incredibly challenging opera for everyone involved."

Lampard attended 39 rehearsals before the first performance. "We rehearsed incredibly hard and every day picked up things in the score that really blow you away," he said. "It could be anything from a harmony, to a fragment of the melody or the way he uses the melody. *La Boheme* is full of *leit motifs* and every character and even some of the props have their own melodies. It's an incredibly emotional experience. I don't know anyone who hasn't been moved by it. To rehearse it and go through that death scene so many times is very draining."

"Schaunard is a fun part to sing and play and is also quite physical. There is an incredible life about the character. You go through a whole wave of emotions and, as for every other character, the death of Mimi is very moving for Schaunard."

The past year has been busy for Lampard. He was the only Australian and the youngest person to be chosen to take part in the Operalia competition in Paris, where Placido Domingo was present to hear him sing. Lampard toured Japan to promote a CD of music by Tasmania Symphony Orchestra principal tuba, Tim Jones, on which he is featured.

He gained first class honours from the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music; conducted and appeared in a series of local concerts; and was part of the *St Matthew Passion* performed at St David's Cathedral in March.

Being involved in Operalia was a memorable experience. "I was competing against singers from the Metropolitan in New York and other opera houses in America and Europe," Lampard said. "It was amazing just to be there. It really helped me to plot where I was in terms of my own progress. I not only got to experience the culture of Paris, which is wonderful, but was in the same room as people like Placido Domingo and Italian soprano Mirella Freni, who are both idols of mine. I really had to think about what I was doing, so I wouldn't be overwhelmed."

Lampard said Domingo advised him to take things slowly. "My voice is maturing earlier than normally expected and it would be easy for a small opera company, anywhere around the world, to hire me for a big role because I wouldn't be as expensive as more established singers. But that could spell the end of my career because it could be too much for my voice at this stage. In terms of opera I'm such a baby. I'm still 10 or 15 years off where vocally I'm aiming to be. Placido said I am on track and have a good voice and technique and that I should go slowly and just let it happen naturally."

Lampard had to turn down an opportunity to be involved in a Launceston performance of *La Boheme* on April 19. "I was marrying my fiancée Kala Mason in the ballroom of the Hobart Town Hall on that day and we had already set the date when I was offered the role," he explained. "I just had to tell them I had another gig that day!"

Later this year, Lampard will travel to the United States. "I've been in touch with a New York composer, Tobias Picker, who is becoming quite a big name in American opera circles. He has had one of his works commissioned by and performed at the Metropolitan," Lampard said. "I studied his work as part of my honours degree and we have built up quite a strong professional relationship. He has just been made artistic advisor to the Di Capo Opera Company in New York, so I'll be meeting them and singing an audition for them while I'm there. They are not a big company but they do some excellent work, including a cycle of Tobias's operas over the next four years.

It will be great to meet him in person and talk to him face to face.”

So stand by for more news from the Big Apple about this precocious Tasmanian baritone.

Wagner captures ancient echoes

Luke Wagner’s haunting, pared-down landscapes capture – in a unique way - Tasmania’s evocative terrain. The Hobart-based artist, whose 22nd solo exhibition, *between the lines*, opens at the Salamanca Collection on 12 May, usually chooses to paint Europeanised Tasmanian scenery, typically pastoral scenes or gardens. Yet his work captures the elemental whispers of these ancient islands.

“For all my life I have been working at



deciphering and understanding the landscape around me,” Wagner says. “There is a rugged, foreboding, primal quality, yet for the past 200 years or so there has been a European influence. I relate strongly to the way the landscape has been Europeanised; made bare then repopulated with ordered European trees. I enjoy using these formal arrangements in my often-simple and structured compositions. Our new Eurocentric culture is still trying to make sense of and understand this timeless landscape. Such an understanding is necessary in order to be able to live in a place and feel connected and comfortable. I am sensitive to the implications and possibilities of human presence in my surroundings. I use suggestions of this presence to imbue poignancy and a feeling of uncertainty.”

In Wagner’s paintings and the landscapes they depict, spaces speak eloquently.

Wagner’s unusual, self-taught technique contributes an emotional, dreamlike quality to his works. His paintings are composed from memory in his airy, self-designed studio facing Mount Wellington from a bush block at Ridgeway. “They are filtered recollections of places, but not actually any particular place,” he says. “Most are amalgamations of several places, but often most reminiscent of one. This intentional method of working allows me freedom to step from the local toward the universal. I consider this important if I am to communicate to a wider audience of people from places other than Tasmania.”

The lower walls of Wagner’s spacious studio are usually lined with partly completed works. His technique is to use many translucent veils of oil paint, one over the other until he has captured the detail he wants. Because of the drying time involved in this approach, he likes to move from canvass to



canvass and often surrounds himself with works-in-progress. Swathes of pared-down terrain line the walls; dramatically back-lit, unnervingly deep and with a rich mix of classical and surrealist elements. “Most of my works are back-lit,” the artist explains, “because I try to capture the drama brought to a scene by the contrast of light and dark. We are blessed with wonderful light in Tasmania and its impact is strongest at the intersections of night and day. To me, these are spiritual times when landscapes can take on the quality of something glimpsed in a dream.”

In one of his artist’s statements, Wagner says: “For me the composition is the most important part of my paintings. This is always resolved in drawings and on the first day of painting, while the paint is still wet. Then glazes of colour and detail are added over many weeks. The use of the face in many of these images is a representation of the self, either the viewer or the artist? The calm and dreamlike repose is intended to underline the spiritual and poetic nature of the painting. These stylised and anonymous figures take their cue from early religious painters, such as Giotto [Giotto di Bondone, Florentine artist 1267-1337].”

While Luke Wagner paints intuitively, his life is anchored and well organised. Meet a human with both sides of his brain working splendidly. The galvanized-iron clad bush home he designed boasts mountain panoramas, well-chosen rustic furniture and gallery-like wall spaces to accommodate an enviable art collection. It is a distinctive house, surrounded by clever landscaping that merges comfortably into the native bush. Wagner's newly built studio is only metres from the house; up an embankment. The house, paved courtyard and studio form a well-thought-out and well executed artist's establishment, suggestive of a man who knows what he needs.

Framing for notable artists, including Lloyd Rees and Tom Samek, inspired Wagner to try his hand at painting. He started with abstract works and his talent was quickly recognised. Unusually, Wagner had a solo exhibition at Hobart's Sidewalk Gallery in 1994 before taking part in his first group exhibition the following year. He was heralded as 'an artist going places' and solo exhibitions followed almost every year as his paintings morphed from abstract to figurative to landscape, without ever fully discarding previously developed approaches. Wagner won the Circular Head Art Award (Island Art Prize) in 1996 and the Central Highlands Art Award in 1999.

As his flourishing framing business shifted from under the house to premises in Brisbane Street, on the edge of the Hobart CBD, Wagner seriously questioned whether he could afford the time to paint as well as run a business. Then in 1999, gallery owner Geoff Thomas persuaded the young artist to get serious about his painting and generate a body of work for a solo exhibition at the Salamanca Collection. It was a sell-out and people actually squabbled over some of the paintings. A year later, the gallery decided to admit people for viewing only at the opening of Wagner's next showing and to delay purchases until 10am on a Saturday morning. Only a few people were then admitted at a time so transactions could be conducted more calmly. Wagner said: "I was stunned by what happened. People actually queued for two hours and it was another sell-out."

The next solo exhibition, in 2001, was even better. The entire collection was sold from the catalogue, while the paintings were still in his studio. He said: "I was aware, of course, that this could not go on indefinitely. Hobart's population was too small to sustain this sort of thing, so I had made an early effort to establish a presence interstate.

I had had a solo exhibition at the Wadi Gallery in Sydney in 1997. Subsequently, I've been able to establish good relationships with the Libby Edwards Galleries, with solo exhibitions in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. As well, there have been solo exhibitions at the Brian Moore Gallery in Sydney and the Crown Casino in Melbourne."

Wagner's solo exhibitions will soon number 22, including eight outside Tasmania. He has contributed to 10 group exhibitions, has paintings in many collections and was a finalist in the Glover Prize for landscape painting in 2007.

In the art world, where creativity often out-ranks organisation, Wagner operates differently. "I'm particularly attentive to the business side of exhibitions, making sure the work is completed within deadlines, that paintings are appropriately framed and that each painting has all the information a potential buyer would require attached to the back."

Wagner has been unusually successful in balancing art and business, dividing his time between his framing workshop and his studio. The balance has shifted gradually from framing to painting, as his framing team's experience has grown and his status as a recognised artist has become increasingly well grounded. He now paints up to four days a week, while spending three days at the framing business. "Both sides of my brain seem to function most of the time," he explains with a laugh.

Wagner's 22nd individual exhibition features 22 new oil-on-Belgian-linen works, including several striking nocturnal scenes that introduce a new phase in his development. Several of Wagner's more familiar *still-life within scenery* paintings feature books, another innovation. He says he was inspired in this by the works of the European surrealist, Giorgio de Chirico, last century. "The books are there to suggest a link between the creativity of the artist and the poet," Wagner says. "I have always felt the strength of the affinity between these two art forms."

Wagner's landscapes sometimes intentionally suggest a theatrical stage set. "I like the innuendo of potential narratives to be played out in front of the Arcadian backdrop I have provided," he says.

Luke Wagner has also created the physical backdrop he needs to continue painting for a very long time.

As his latest sombre nocturnal works suggest, he will continue to evolve, but his art will also remain anchored by a set of long-held principles. "Poetry, truth, beauty and honesty are things I put most value on," he says.

For more information: www.lukewagner.com.au

Author at our edge

Award-winning New Zealand author, Neville Peat, visited Tasmania in April to research the



nature, geography and human history of our east coast for inclusion in a book on the Tasman Sea. Born and based in Otago, the widely travelled Peat has had nearly 40 books published, most of them relating to the natural history of his homeland, its Subantarctic and tropical islands and its Antarctic programs.

Peat was awarded an NZ\$100,000 Michael King Writers Fellowship by Creative New Zealand (the national arts council) last year to research and write a Tasman Sea study, as well as a third book in a popular series of fictionalised natural history stories, this one set in the spectacular mountains at the head of Lake Wakatipu in the South Island. Peat is the fifth recipient of his country's richest and most coveted literary award.

"The Tasman Sea is a huge subject in itself," Peat said. "There's a wealth of history, biology, oceanography and climatology involved. When you start to explore such trans-Tasman connections as the New Zealand screw shell invasion of Tasmanian waters and the invasion of New Zealand by Australian brushtail possums it becomes quite daunting. I had hoped during my visit in April to establish contacts with Tasmanian-based people with specialised knowledge, so that dialogues could be maintained while I am developing the manuscript. People at CSIRO, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and the Maritime Museum were just wonderful. I could not have asked for a better reception."

As well as conversing with the specialists, Peat travelled up the east coast for first-hand impressions of the western rim of the Tasman Sea. He spent time with veteran fishers, exploring the concept of generational changes in people's expectations of their environments. He joined the tourists on a commercial eco-cruise around the southern tip of Bruny Island, crossing the boundary between the Tasman Sea and the Southern Ocean. It was an extraordinarily calm day on an expanse of water with a bawdy reputation. Australian fur seals, New Zealand fur seals, bottle-nosed dolphins, shy albatrosses and Buller's albatrosses and a solitary white-bellied sea eagle put on an extravagant wildlife show.

"That cruise deepened my realisation that my pre-planned Tasmanian visit was much too short," the author said with a rueful smile.

Neville Peat has always insisted that life should be interesting. He played basketball for Otago province while completing his cadetship as a journalist in Dunedin and then set off for Africa, where he was shipping correspondent for *The Argus* in Cape Town and picked up the nickname 'Bo'sun'. After two years working and travelling in southern Africa, Peat toured South America in a battered VW combi with two fellow *Argus* journalists and the wife of one of them. They wrote magazine articles as they explored from Patagonia to the Peruvian *altiplano* and the Amazon basin, making a memorable visit to the then-remote Galapagos Islands. Peat worked his way back to New Zealand as press officer on a P&O liner.

After a spell as editor of the *Kalonakali*, Tonga's national newspaper, during which his forehead was permanently depressed during an exuberant island rugby match, Peat embarked on his 25-year career as New Zealand's best-known natural history writer. While he was crafting more than a million published words, Peat found time to undertake information and public awareness duties for New Zealand's official Antarctic and overseas aid programs. (He has visited Antarctica three times and has intimate knowledge of his country's Subantarctic islands). Peat has been New Zealand study tour leader for Smithsonian Journeys and other American educational tour agencies, based on the expedition ship *Clipper Odyssey*. In 1994, he won the inaugural Dunedin Citizen of the Year award for a series of photographic souvenir books on the city as well as the establishment of the Dunedin Environmental Business Network and other environmental initiatives.

Peat was responsible for writing a successful World Heritage Area nomination for the New Zealand Subantarctic Islands, as well as a discussion document that led to the establishment of the Rakiura National Park on Stewart Island. He was elected three times as an Otago Regional Councillor, was the council's Deputy Chair for four years and chaired its Environment and Science Committee.

Somehow he found time to undertake concept development, research and the writing of 30,000 words for Otago Museum's 1,200 sq m gallery *Southern Land, Southern People*. He also prepared information displays at the Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaroa Head and the New Zealand Marine Studies Centre at Portobello Peninsula.

Peat lives with his wife Mary and daughter Sophie on the beautiful and environmentally significant Otago Peninsula.

Incat's biggest earner

Incat Tasmania's newest 112.6-metre vessel, *Natchan World*, entered service on Tsugaru Strait between the Japanese islands of Honshu and Hokkaido in early May, after being delivered to ferry operator Higashi Nihon Ferry two months ahead of schedule. The giant catamaran took just seven days to make the voyage from Hobart via Brisbane to its home port of Hakodate.



The 11,000 gross tonnes *Natchan World* joins a sister-ship, *Natchan Rera*, on the inter-island run. Incat Chairman Robert Clifford said: "Incat has reached a new pinnacle in high speed craft and comfort with *Natchan World*. This is our most valuable export to date. Operating at speeds of approximately 40 knots, the vessel has capacity for up to 800 people and 355 cars, or 450 lane-metres of trucks and 193 cars."

Changes implemented since *Natchan Rera* was delivered in August 2007 include a new facility for Executive Class passengers which cannot be experienced in any other form of transport. Mr Clifford said: "Instead of individual seats, there are small booth-style compartments for two to four passengers. In each compartment, passengers are free to take off their shoes and lie down. Massage chairs will be installed ... families and couples will enjoy not only their time in private with amazing comfort but also the vast scale of ocean view in front of each booth. This amenity cannot be enjoyed on flights, trains or cruise ships."

Meanwhile, Austal has launched its first Tasmanian-built vessel, a 47.5m catamaran ferry for Macau operator New World First Ferry. The ship was built at the former North West Bay Ships facility at Margate that was acquired last year by the West Australian-based Austal. The 120-strong workforce will now concentrate on a sister-ship for the same customer.

\$492,000 for Arts projects

Four arts projects have received State Government grants of more than \$492,000, with Devonport's BIG hART Inc the biggest winner with \$141,880 awarded to help with a one-year *This is Living* performance program. Other recipients were:

- Tasmanian Regional Arts - \$50,000 to develop a new media installation exploring young Tasmanians' sense of place.
- Tasdance - \$95,350 for a program of dance workshops and performances on King Island, Cape Barren Island and Flinders Island.
- Ten Days on the Island - \$30,500 for the development of *Origins*, a totally Tasmanian work to be performed in 2009.

The latest round of special grants takes the total so far allocated for the Arts in 2007-08 to \$2,877,483.

Vegetable campaign steams ahead

A Tasmanian vegetable marketing campaign is underway with advertisements appearing in major national newspapers and lifestyle magazines to promote the virtues of Tasmanian vegetables. Billboards are in place at Hobart and Launceston Airports. The Minister for Primary Industry, David Llewellyn said the State Government was also working with major producers on incorporating the *Taste is in our nature - Tassie Vegetables* message on their packaging. "Houstons Farms and Brandsema cherry tomatoes have already adopted the logo," he said. "Harvest Moon is having its labels changed on a range of its products and discussions are underway with Webster Fresh and other processors." The State Government has committed \$850,000 for projects to be commissioned by the newly formed Vegetable Industry Marketing Committee.

KUth hits hot rocks

Geothermal explorer KUth Energy has reported promising early results after drilling 16 holes in its search for "hot rocks" in Tasmania. Heat flow values in its exploration tenement in the north-east of the State are among the top 17 per cent yet found in Australia and similar to the highly promising Cooper Basin. Chief Operating Officer, Malcolm Ward, said: "We have outcropping known hot granites to the north and east of the project area and geophysical evidence that granites continue south and west ... now we have confirmation of strong, consistent surface heat flows from approximately 1,200km². This is a large area and although further anomalous areas may be defined we are already planning follow-up drilling to further test this zone."

Photos add to midwinter fun

Hobart's 2008 Antarctic Midwinter Festival will feature an Extreme Photography Competition that is expected to attract entries from all over the world. The best entry will earn a \$5,000 Salmon Ponds Prize, while a \$2,000 Pure Tasmania prize will be awarded to the best Antarctic image taken by an amateur photographer.

The 10-day festival marking the winter solstice and celebrating Tasmania's living and historical links with Antarctica, attracted 40,000 people last year. The program will again include a Huskies' Picnic, the Longest Night Film Festival and Solstice Antarctica. The Antarctic Midwinter Festival runs from Friday 20 June to Sunday 29 June.

For further information:
www.antarctic-tasmania.info

New Chief Justice

Launceston-based Justice Ewan Crawford, 67, was sworn in during April as the new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Tasmania, replacing Peter Underwood OA, who is now Governor of Tasmania. Justice Crawford was admitted as a legal practitioner to the Supreme Court of Tasmania in 1964, was appointed as a judge of Tasmania's Supreme Court in 1988 and is highly regarded within the legal fraternity after a distinguished 37-year career.

Extra drought funding

The State Government will provide a \$2.5 million drought-relief package to farmers and their communities. Farmers will be assisted with costs associated with maintaining breeding stock, while rural communities will be supported to help them cope with flow-on problems caused by the drought. The Country Women's Association has been distributing small cash grants to help farming families pay for food, rates, power and telephone bills and the Government will now help fund this activity.

Telecos lead boom

Engineering work totalling \$928 million was undertaken in Tasmania during the year to December 2007, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The 7.7 per cent rise to record levels was led by the telecommunications sector, where investment rose 154.2 per cent to \$118.8 million.

Vermin team visits 'Macca'

Parks and Wildlife Service staff have had a first-hand look at the issues involved in eradicating rabbits, rats and mice from the Macquarie Island Nature Reserve and World Heritage Area. Three eradication specialists spent 10 days in late March walking the length and breadth of the island, 500km south-east of Hobart. The Australian and Tasmanian governments will jointly fund the \$24.6 million project.

Greenhouse watchdog named

International consultancy Parsons Brinckerhoff, one of the world's most highly regarded environmental, planning, engineering and project management firms, has been engaged to audit the Government's greenhouse emissions. "While other state governments have audited some of their operations, Tasmania will be the first State to embark on a whole-of-government audit of emissions," the Premier, Paul Lennon, said in April.

Positive jobs trend

The number of long term unemployed people in Tasmania has fallen 27.2 per cent in 12 months to a record low of 2,700, according to figures for the year to March released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The overall unemployment rate also fell in all regions, with Mersey-Lyell down 1.8 per cent, the southern region down 0.8 per cent and the northern region down 0.5 per cent.

Dancer's big step

Nineteen-year-old Tasmanian dancer, Rachael Ireson, will play Wendy in the Peter Pan segment of a musical overview of the life of Walt Disney to be performed at Tokyo Disneyland. The former Collegiate pupil, who has trained in classical ballet as well as theatrical dancing, will leave in August to begin her nine-month contract in Japan.

Outlook upgraded

Access Economics upgraded Tasmania's economic growth forecast from 2.4 per cent to 3.9 per cent in its March Business Outlook. The company reported that the State's performance had remained resilient, despite a slowing world economy and higher interest rates. Access said overseas migration had contributed to continuing population gains.

For further information contact :

Robert Heazlewood
Executive Director, Brand Tasmania Council Inc.
Telephone 03 6229 5719 **Mobile** 0419 564 745
Email Robert.Heazlewood@brandtasmania.com

Mike Jenkinson
Communications Consultant, Brand Tasmania Editor
Email mjenk40@bigpond.net.au

Snail Mail to PO Box 957 Sandy Bay, Tasmania, 7006