

# The Cooperage



## A Yalumba Tradition

Coopering has been an important part of Yalumba's history and a proud tradition at the winery since the turn of the 20th century. Since WWII, the emphasis has been more on crafting barrels, making Yalumba the only winery in the Southern Hemisphere to have a truly operational winery cooperage and one of a select group that includes such vini-luminaries as Chateau Mouton Rothschild, Chateau Margaux and Chateau Petrus.

Yalumba employs four full-time coopers. Master Cooper, Andrew Broad and his team have around fifty years' experience under their collective belts. Between the four of them, they craft around one third – or the total annual new oak requirement - of the barrels required for maturation of Yalumba wines. This totals around 400 barrels a year or enough to cover the top end of the Yalumba portfolio – 75% for red wine and 25% for white.

The majority of the oak utilised by Yalumba is American, closely followed by French and a tiny proportion Hungarian. Raw oak staves are imported from the best oak forests in these countries and then seasoned in the Barossa elements at Yalumba to leach out any sappy, bitter tannins from the wood. This allows for longer oak maturation without over-oaking the wine, giving a subtler oak character and more complexity in the finished wine.

The timber staves undergo an extended seasoning for 5-8 years – oak is generally only seasoned for 18 months to 2 years. Ageing its own oak is extremely important to Yalumba because it allows absolute control over the oak and the end flavour of the wine – another key in Yalumba's philosophy of 'controlling the controllables' to make superlative wines.

## Making a Great Barrel

The traditional skills of the cooper allow better quality control and more consistent results. Top quality oak is required – a tree that has grown slowly in the high forest and a fine textured wood that will impart subtle, non-aggressive tannin. Once the tree is felled, the wood is cut into a rough stave length, following the grain of the wood to reduce the possibility of any porous leaks.

After seasoning, the rough staves are prepared. Each stave is shaped and planed to a uniform thickness then assembled one by one around the bung (or hole to access the wine) stave. The staves then undergo 'bending' which involves warming the barrel over a low flame until the timber becomes supple enough to gently form the barrel shape.

Toasting exposes the inside of the barrel to the burning fire of an oak wood brazier to reveal a palette of aromas that will later be seen in the finished wine. There are several toast levels which the coopers tailor to the winemakers' requirements.

'Crozing' is the next step where the still-hot barrel is prepared with grooves cut into the staves for the heads (top and bottom of the barrel) to be fitted. Assembling and fitting the heads is a skill that requires precision shaping and preparation to ensure a perfect seal. The barrel is then tested under air and water pressure before the galvanized steel hoops that hold the barrel together are fitted. The barrel is now complete and the cooper places his seal on the cask head as a sign of quality.



Yalumba The Octavius, an old vine Barossa Shiraz, is the only table wine in the world to be aged in octaves. The octave barrel ranges from 80-100 litres and is made from Missouri American oak seasoned at Yalumba for 8 years.