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## Wine by Huon Hooke

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**Sandalford** owns some of the oldest vines in Margaret River, planted in 1970 on one of the best sites, at Willyabrup. Its recent cabernet sauvignons have been excellent, but in perception and price they lag behind the region's elite such as Cullen, Cape Mentelle and neighbour Moss Wood. I suspect that in a few years they will be up there with the best, because things at Sandalford have changed in a big way.

Winemaker Paul Boulden, who arrived from Yalumba in 2001, sheds some light. "When I arrived, Sandalford was making 12,000 cases of cabernet a year, but only selling 4000. Now we're making less – 10,000 cases – and selling out of it," he says.

They didn't even make a semillon sauvignon blanc – the region's most popular wine. Now they do, and it sells an impressive 8000 cases a year. The Sandalford chardonnay used to mix prime Margaret River grapes of the famed Gingin clone with fruit

from other areas, including the Swan Valley, and it was aged in cheap American oak. Now the chardonnay is 100 per cent Margaret River, all French oak, and much improved.

So what changed? Many winemaking and viticultural practices, plus a new focus on Sandalford as a single-estate Margaret River winery (it has 90 hectares of vines) and a great relationship with national distributor Tucker Seabrook.

And Boulden's '01 and '02 cabernets are both trophy winners. The now available '03 (\$34) is a bright, tautly constructed red berry and mint style of cabernet, with a lick of crushed-leaf regional aroma, and plenty of tannin adding firmness, length and authority to the palate. Serve it fairly cool because it's 14.5 per cent alcohol. It's well-structured for ageing and will drink well for a good 15 years. If you can't keep from opening it, serve it with pink roast lamb. ■

*Distributors: 1300 668 712.*