



Want beer? Look for wine...

**dam Randall and his Toyota seek
at the beers of Western Australia**

IN AME your favourite Australian beer is one of those estions that's likely to use an embarrassed silence a gathering of real ale enthusiasts. And to be honest, the case for Oz beer not helped by the sun-seed ads where the main lling point is the icy rving temperature. But let's quit the Pommie nigger act and knowledge that there is me fine beer to be had in z, though you might have look for it. A recent trip to eastern Australia provided a ideal opportunity to fire the search engine - albeit rented Toyota in this case. An obvious first port of If was that pioneering ask, the Sail & Anchor. ceated on the tourist strip Fremantle just outside rth, it was Australia's first

beautiful vineyard complete with lake and majestic gum trees. The six beers on offer were in tip-top form, including a classic banana-toned wheat beer, an "English" best bitter which shames many genuine ones, and a marvellously quaffable honey porter.

Another chance discovery was the Blackwood Valley brewery in Bridgetown, which also doubles as a cidery. The standard bitter was - well, standard - but the porter was prizeworthy: roasty and chocolaty with a lovely bitter-sweet finish. The internet provided the next hits, in the established wine-making area of Margaret River. The newest

Brewery north of Margaret River. It's 10 years old but hasn't lost its gloss, with the lakeside garden an ideal spot for sampling the half-dozen beers. This Ylla stood out due to its sharp, resinous hoppiness, while Seidler's Pale was multi-dimensional - herbal, fruity, hopply aromatic - just beyond Yallingup is the Wicked Ale brewery, where new owner Daniel Wind was leading the fray. Wicked was easily the most bizarre find, from the circular pool table to the dizzily eccentric beers. Dark Wheat claimed to be 100 per cent roasted wheat malt, with rich coffee-chocolate overtones at a very modest 3.4 per cent. Scottish Ale and Russian Imperial Stout feature on the menu, but purists may sniff at specialities such as chocolate or apple beer. Fern, you'll find

overdone oompah-and-lederhosen German theme. The tiny 50-litre brewery in the restaurant looks like a model, and I hope my genuine enquiry - "where's the real one?" - didn't cause offence. Here the Classic Pilsener was unremarkable, but the Wheat Stout compensated with its creamy brown head and roasty coffee-chocolate notes. Ethars pulls off its German theme with much more dignity, letting the food and beer make the case. The beers are all to Reichelsgut standard, lagged for six weeks and unfiltered. The All was good but rather more fruity than might be expected. The fruitiness, presumably down to the yeast, carried over into the nicey bitter Pilsner. The Weizen was complex - tart and grainy, refreshing but with an odd aroma. Feral Brewing purveys a broader continental theme, from an easy drinking Weizen to a

to a robustly malty German Red in the Viennese style. The Belgian White was a superb Wit beer, with coriander and orange peel contributing to a herbal, citrus finish. Iron Bark Brewery is the least polished but probably best of the Swan Valley micros. Owner Graeme White has built up the place piecemeal over the last four years, and the evolving beer range seems to have followed suit - hocks, brown ales, Pilsners, even a non-alcoholic ginger beer which could tempt you to temperance. The wheat beer and stout were in particularly fine form, and the cherry ale is superb - real fruit with a refreshing, lambic finish. So out in the wilds of Oz there really are alternatives to the amber nectar. And given that more than half of the finds were by chance, the question is: what was missed? Answers on a postcard!