MARK Woods’s winemaking credo is simple, but challenging: “I want to make wines that hit the right note.”

Being the modest, thoughtful man he is, and with vivid memories of the rain-plagued 2008 and 2012 vintages, Mark knows it’s not an aim achievable every year in the Hunter Valley. But he has produced a remarkable number of Hunter wines that play sweet music in the four years since he became senior winemaker at Bill and Vicki Widin’s Broke Road, Pokolbin, Leogate Estate.

Here’s evidence: in January this year, I selected the Leogate Estate 2011 Western Slopes Reserve Shiraz at my 2013 Wine of the Year, Red of the Year and Shiraz of the Year. Earlier last year at the 2013 Hunter Valley Wine Show, the 2011 Western Slopes Reserve won the Len Evans Trophy for best named vineyard wine and the Djorgoff Family Trophy for best named vineyard dry red.

Its stablemate, the Leogate Estate 2011 The Basin Reserve Shiraz, was one of my top shiraz vineyard wine and the Drayton Family Trophy winner at Bill and Vicki Widin’s Broke Road, Pokolbin, Leogate Estate.

Leogate’s reds and white are harmonious drops, writes John Lewis.

The Gatecrasher 2013

Hilltops Pinot Noir, $40

HERE’S a pinot with punch made by Mark Woods from grapes from the Freeman vineyard near Young. It’s 14.5 per cent alcohol and is bright ruby red. The nose has scents of violets and ripe, juicy raspberry flavour and a hint of blackcurrant, the front of the palate. Moroello cherry, spice and spearmint fruit characters marry with restrained coconutty oak on the middle palate, and dusty tannins come in to play at the finish.

DRINK WITH: duck liver paté with kumquat, sauternes jelly

AGING: eight years

RATING: 91

PRODUCING THE GOODS: Leogate Estate winemaker Mark Woods.

Orchids inspire Cossack label

I RECENTLY wrote in praise of the $23 Ferngrove 2013 Frankland River Cossack Riesling and some people may have been puzzled by the Cossack reference. It has nothing to do with Russia. The wine’s name comes from the Western Australian Cossack spider orchid, a drawing of which appears on the label.

Ferngrove, in the Frankland River sub-region of Western Australia’s Great Southern wine region, has an orchid range of whites and reds each with a label featuring a native or rare orchid.

Current releases include the $22 Ferngrove 2011 King Mallorie, $25 2013 Diamond Chardonnay and the $25 2013 Diamond Cabernet Sauvignon.

They are named for the King spider, Majestic spider, Dragon and Dragon spider orchids.

Ferngrove’s primary owner is Chinese national Xingfa Ma, who purchased the majority of Ferngrove shares in 2011. Other Ferngrove shareholders include some employees and original shareholders, such as former Murray Barton.