2009 Swings & Roundabouts Sauvignon Blanc Semillon (Margaret River), $20
One of the earlier "designer" wine brands aimed at consumers who like decent wine and a good story. And, with fresh aromas of passionfruit, wild herbs and freshly cut grass, this classic Margaret River blend delivers. Its generous flavours and lively acidity make it an ideal anytime-of-day drink.

2009 Good Catholic Girl Teresa Riesling (Clare Valley), $25
Julie Ann Barry is one of the late Jim Barry's many children. With her brothers running the family winery, Julie created her own self-mocking label, Good Catholic Girl. This trim, taut and terrific Clare riesling has spicy aromas of orange blossom and freshly squeezed limes, with the depth and length to last at least a decade.

2008 Some Young Punks Passion Has Red Lips Cabernet Sauvignon/ Shiraz (SA), $23
This joint-venture brand boasts labels based on early 1900s pulp-fiction novels. The label may be saucy but the juice is good, with cabernet sauvignon from McLaren Vale and shiraz from Padthaway. It's bold and brash with lush, dark berry fruit and firm, well-structured tannins. Drink with a rare steak.

2008 First Drop Wines Mother's Ruin Cabernet Sauvignon (McLaren Vale), $26
The guys at First Drop have lots of fun – but only after the hard work of making quality wine. The label may be at the edge but this is a classic cabernet with a good depth of mulberry and dark berry with hints of mocha and star anise. Smooth tannins pave the way to a long, fine finish.

2007 Ladies who Shoot their Lunch Shiraz (Strathbogie Ranges), $35
When the Plunkett and Fowles families merged their winemaking interests, the game was on with a new tongue-in-cheek name and story. This is a rich, spicy shiraz with aromas of ripe plums, dark chocolate, liquorice and pepper. Bright flavours and mild-mannered tannins make this a perfect match with wild rabbit.

Some Young Punks, Tar & Roses, Leaping Lizard, The Black Chook, Angus the Bull. Names of Australian wines have come a long way from having to incorporate a river or brook, a ridge or a valley.

Once, Australian wineries chose European lookalike terms such as château, cellar or domain when it came to naming their precious drops. Most traditional European wine brands incorporate the proprietor's family name – think Bollinger and Leflaive in France, Antinori and Gaja in Italy, the British-owned port houses of Warre's and Dow's or Spain's Torres and Muga families. Australian winegrowers historically followed the same personalised approach, including top brands like Henschke and Penfolds – although Penfolds has been a corporate brand for more than 30 years.

The Henschkes have Australia's most famous "hill" – Hill of Grace. They've been keen to protect its stellar status so weren't too happy when rival winery Rosemount came out with a Mudgee brand Hill of Gold. More recently, the Henschkes created the Hill of Roses label to protect the name from other uses. However, they don't seem too concerned about a backyard sangiovese from Orange bottled as Hill of Hoist.

In the export world, Australia is best known for its "critter" brands – with Wallaby White and Kangarouge way back in the 1970s and the recent flock of Black Swans and Little Penguins. Cockatoo Ridge and Butterfly Ridge have a foot in both animal and topographical camps. And there's no denying the huge success of Yellow Tail, which was selected by the Casella family for their international foray less than a decade ago.

On home turf, we have more than 2400 wine labels vying for attention. How to stand out? A striking label can add impact on a retail shelf but an idiosyncratic name works even better in print – be it on a wine list or in an article. So along come quirky brands such as Ten Minutes by Tractor, Sons of Eden, Brothers in Arms, Four Sisters, First Drop, 3drops, 3 Rings and the challenging Bitch. The latter two come from R Wines, a joint venture between respected Barossa winemaker Chris Ringland and American wine importer Dan Phillips. And both wines are very good – after all, it's the content of the bottle that really counts.

Some highly credible producers use eccentric titles as sub-brands – d'Arenberg is top of mind with The Sticks & Stones, The Galvo Garage, The Feral Fox and The Dead Arm. Others tag their second-tier wines with fun names – Giant Steps has Innocent Bystander, Devil's Lair has Fifth Leg, Stella Bella offers Skuttlebutt and Suckfizzle and Philip Shaw has The Wire Walker Pinot Noir, The Dreamer Viognier and The Idiot Shiraz.

Gary Farr has his tongue firmly in his cheek, tagging his eponymous brands by grape variety – Chardonnay by Farr, Viognier by Farr. His Sangreal by Farr is a nod to pinot noir's reputation as the "holy grail" of grape varieties. Check out Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* for the sangreal/ Holy Grail connection. The Farrs are an extremely droll family with Gary's son, Nick, labelling his wines as Farr Rising.

The take-home message? In today's market, call your brand what you like – as long as the wine is good.

wine
name games

Photography **Jennifer Soo**

Aussie winemakers love a quirky label. Fortunately, they're big on substance, too, writes Peter Bourne.