

Always room for quality



WINE

James Halliday

RON BROWN is the wily old fox heading the Maverick Wines partnership with Jeremy Vogler, Adrian Bell and Christopher Taylor (the winemaker). Brown is based in Tokyo and has had a leading role in many facets of the wine sales industry of Japan.

He and his partners moved swiftly during the grape surplus years to acquire four vineyards in prime positions in South Australia's Barossa and Eden valleys in 2004. They are Trial Hill in Pewsey Vale in the hills of the eastern Eden Valley; Old Ben in the so-called High Eden Valley; and Barossa Ridge in the Vine Vale subregion and Greenock Rise in the Greenock subregion in the hills of northern Barossa.

Maverick produces four single-vineyard shirazes from these plantings, Trial Hill Eden Valley Shiraz being the flagbearer. In all, there is a touch over 30ha, the lion's share to shiraz (17ha plus), the remainder a mix of chardonnay, riesling, grenache and cabernet sauvignon (plus or minus 2ha each), with smaller parcels of merlot, cabernet franc, petit verdot, semillon, roussanne and viognier. Vine age is between four and more than 100 years, the majority of vines 10 to 30 years old.

The promotional material assembled is slick and sophisticated, particularly given the wide range of markets Maverick has already penetrated. In Australia it is a mix of the best restaurants in Sydney (namely Tetsuya's, the Boathouse on Blackwattle Bay, Catalina, Assiette, Atelier and Le Pelican) and Adelaide (the Grange Restaurant at the Hilton, the Hyatt Regency, Cos and more) plus specialist retailers in both cities. Interestingly, Melbourne has, with one exception (Europe Cellars), been ignored.

In Tokyo, 11 of the most desirable restaurants and hotels carry the wine, plus the Hilton in Osaka. In addition, sales to Britain, Singapore and The Philippines are to be followed by the US, Russia, India and Scandinavia.

The cake is being sliced very thinly: production in 2006-07 was a little more than 3000 cases but is projected to rise to more than 7000 cases in 2008. Time will tell whether drought and frost will stand in the way. The biggest volume of any of the individual vineyard wines so far released in Australia is 970 cases (the 2006 Maverick Twins Barossa Grenache Shiraz Mataro) with the 2005 Trial Hill Shiraz (a beautiful wine; 96 points, \$60) only 460 cases.

This may all seem a smoke-and-mirrors game but

the quality of the wines is exemplary and the prices sensibly pitched. Moreover, 30ha of vines should be capable of producing 15,000 to 20,000 cases, assuming they are in full bearing.

At the moment much of the volume is in two wines: Australian Terroirs Barossa Chook Red (a shiraz) and Eden Valley Chook White (a chardonnay). The derivation of the name for these second labels is distinctly quixotic. Brown asked Andrew Caillard to provide a brightly coloured painting for the label. Caillard, as well as co-head of Langton's wine auctions, is an accomplished painter. He rang Brown to say some chooks had mysteriously found their way on to the painting and asked whether this was OK. The answer was in the affirmative and the planned Terroirs White and Red had Chook appended to the names.

The price was planned to be 20 per cent above large-selling brands such as Jacob's Creek but to offer greater value, both in quality and by single-region origin. The success of the wines took Maverick by surprise, the 2000 cases of each disappearing overnight. The plan is to double production in 2008, using (as in '07) grapes from young vines plus contract-grown grapes.

It pays to be in the right place at the right time if you read the cards right. The shift from grape surplus to acute shortage has occurred with dizzying speed, making the timing all the more felicitous. Just as droughts end with rain, there is likely to be another surplus down the track. When there is, Brown and co will probably be there to take advantage.

FROM THE REGION

2007 Maverick Trial Hill Eden Valley Riesling

THE 2007 Trial Hill Eden Valley Riesling (94 points, \$33) is remarkably good given the hot, dry, early-ripening vintage. It comes from a 2ha block on a northeast-facing slope in an amphitheatre high in the valley and has lemon, lime, mineral and spice aromas, then a very intense and long palate of ripe apple and citrus flavours, finishing with fresh, citrusy acidity. It may live and develop for a decade but there is abundant flavour now, so there is no need to wait.

www.maverickwines.com.au

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