



SHANE HARRIS, WINES BY GEOFF HARDY

A ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

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DAN TRAUCKI

SHANE Harris, the boy from Bundaberg, travelled an unusual route to becoming an award winning winemaker. Growing up in the heart of Queensland’s rum country, Harris became a qualified chef working in modern bistros in Brisbane during the late 1990s. Along the way many glasses of wine were sent to the kitchen by eager wine sales reps and appreciative diners. This sparked an interest in wine and the positive attributes it can bring to the table when enjoying a good meal.

A pondering on “what makes a wine good” led to a search for more information. Walking past a news stand near the Fortitude Valley train station one day Harris noticed the glossy cover of *Winestate* magazine. “The more I learnt about wine and its production the more questions of how and why popped into my head,” he said. He already knew Bruce Humphery-Smith from Severn Brae Estate Wines (Granite Belt) so he called him and asked if he could visit and see how the wines were made. It wasn’t long before Harris was visiting regularly to lend a hand and learn more about wine and its production. From there “I did the rounds of the Stanthorpe wineries, ending up moving to Stanthorpe when an offer to work with Jim Barnes at Heritage Wines of Stanthorpe was put on the table”. Harris made the move and his first child, Faith, was born two weeks later in Stanthorpe Hospital. “It wasn’t long before my growing passion for grenache led me to decide to move south to work with grenache in South Australia”. This passion eventually led to an opportunity to work at d’Arenberg in McLaren Vale as a cellar hand in 2002, after a quick stint for vintage in the Strathbogies of Victoria.

He progressed to an assistant winemaker role at Classic McLaren Wines under Tony De’Lisio, where for four years he made small batch wines, 100 per cent open ferment, hand plunged and shovelling skins. This was for Harris “a great learning experience, doing everything there was to do from fruit receipt, the lab work to working on the bottling line. I think that winemaking should be taught like a trade, hands on and learning from experience.” He noted that textbooks work in a perfect world scenario but “theories can go out the door pretty quickly when faced with the onslaught of vintage. It’s knowing what to do instinctively when things don’t go to plan that make a huge difference as a winemaker.”

As winemaker and cellar manager at McLaren Vale Vintners in 2006, Harris met Geoff Hardy. A bond formed between the two and in 2009 he became the first full-time winemaker for Wines by Geoff Hardy.

Harris makes the wines for all of Hardy’s labels, including K1, Pertaringa, GMH and Hand Crafted by Geoff Hardy. Last year the “group” bottled 76 different wines across the portfolio. “Geoff has generations of experience and a keen interest in the development of the emerging varieties that the group makes,” Harris said. “At one stage we peaked at 32 different varieties across four major wine growing areas in South Australia. This is now down to 25 varieties that we want to continue to focus on from potential shown in those early trials.” “Geoff, as a viticulturist, has an amazing knowledge of the Southern

Vales both historical and awareness of how things might move forward in the future. That continual drive for what’s next and how we can do things better is a constant motivation that Geoff and I share. That’s why we click as a team. We both appreciate and respect each other’s strengths.”

This relationship paid early dividends with Wines by Geoff Hardy winning the 2012 *Winestate* Winery of the Year award, while at the same time Harris, at age 34, was named *Winestate* Winemaker of the Year.

“Wherever we seem to focus, it lights another fire,” Harris said. “Not only with emerging varieties but also with the sales team growing our market share across the world for traditional varieties like shiraz and cabernet.” Wines by Geoff Hardy has seen huge developments in its overseas markets, recording double-digit export growth each year for seven consecutive years, and is on track to achieve this again for the current financial year. Between 2012 and 2018, the company’s export sales revenue grew by a massive 2204 per cent and 464 per cent overall revenue growth between 2011 and 2019 YTD.

So far this financial year, exports are up 220 per cent compared to the same time last year.

While sales to China have played a major role in the company’s growth (increasing from only 1 per cent of revenue in 2011 to 53 per cent of total bottled wine sales revenue in 2018), the company has also opened new markets in Vietnam, the US, India, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, as well as maintaining its long-term markets like Finland.

At Wines by Geoff Hardy the pursuit of business excellence doesn’t end on the bottling line. While superior quality in their winemaking and viticulture is important, excellence across every aspect of the business is equally important as they have a relentless commitment to this in everything they do.

FINALISTS



A.



B.



C.



D.

A. Peter Hall, McGuigan Wines.

B. David Morris, Morris Wines.

C. Chris Hatcher, Wolf Blass

D. Shavaughn Wells, Saltram Wines.