



Glaetzer Versus Glaetzer

Family Winemakers | Ben and Nick's wines are as different as the brothers' personalities. One successful winemaker in the family is usually plenty, but this Australian clan doesn't do things by half.

By Jane Faulkner | Posted Thursday, 14May2015 www.wine-searcher.com

Since the day he was born, Ben Glaetzer has been surrounded by vineyards, and immersed in a family tradition of making wine. There was no question he would follow suit. After all, it was in his genes.

Fast-forward 38 years and the Barossa Valley winemaker is the successful name behind the lauded Amon-Ra Shiraz, and the designer behind its striking hieroglyphic label. He co-owns and runs the family business, Glaetzer Wine, which his father Colin created in 1995. And, in between, he is in partnership with several other winemaking enterprises including Heartland – focusing on Langhorne Creek and Limestone Coast fruit – and Mitolo, which puts the spotlight on McLaren Vale.

With all that juggling, perhaps he should have joined the circus. However, Ben initially studied medicine.

"I started helping out in the winery and once immersed in the barrel room, I didn't want to leave. I didn't want anything to do with anything else from then on," says Ben.

Don't be fooled by Ben's burly stature and bald head – so shiny it looks polished. He grew up surrounded by strong, wonderful women, including his mother, Judith, who died last year. Ben and his brothers, Sam and Nick – and especially their father – are still coming to terms with their loss. "She was the glue that held this family together," he says. "We were all very close to her."

Then there's his maternal grandmother who, at 96, still loves a drink. The Glaetzer Wallace Shiraz Grenache is named in her honor – Wallace is the ancestral family name – while the 100percent Shiraz called Bishop takes his mother's maiden name. The label's symbol features the Roman goddess, Venus, representing female energy and strength and the Shiraz Cabernet known as Anaperenna is a female Roman deity of the New Year. The odd one out, in name only, is Amon-Ra – the king of all gods in Egyptian mythology. It is a luscious, full-bodied and structured Shiraz with intense, succulent fruit.

According to Wine Searcher, Amon-Ra is the second most sought after Barossa wine in terms of user searches, and The Wine Advocate has consistently handed out high scores: 97+ for 2012, 95+ for 2011, 2010 at 97 points – you get the picture.

Since the two other Glaetzer boys grew up in the same wine family, surely wine's their thing, too? Yes it is. But the oldest, Sam, has taken the corporate route and is managing director of Constellation Brands New Zealand. It is 35-year-old Nick who is following suit, albeit making Shiraz that is the antithesis of Barossa styles. He's based in Australia's coolest winemaking state, Tasmania, and also makes Riesling and Pinot Noir. Ben and Nick share the same US importer, Epicurean Wines based in Seattle.

GlaetzerDixon Family Winemakers

Nick's wine memories are shaped differently to Ben's. He remembers a father working hard for long hours with seemingly little reward. "Besides, all I ever wanted to do was mechatronic engineering, make robots and do exciting stuff."

Nick was on that path, studying hard, although he realized the likelihood of working with NASA was slim and he'd probably be stuck making washing-machine parts. He took time off from his studies squeezing in vintages in France before heading to Weingut Eugen Müller in the Pfalz region of Germany. He loved those textural Rieslings; something just clicked. Wine was to be his vocation after all.

"I couldn't see myself working in the Barossa – Ben and Dad were doing well and I couldn't have done it better. Anyway, I wanted to make my own wine," says Nick.

Based initially in the cooler climate of Margaret River, he learnt about fine Chardonnay. He had to go to Tasmania to learn how to make Pinot Noir, where he now lives with wife, Sally Dixon, hence the name GlaetzerDixon Family Winemakers.

Nick has a love of Burgundy but also Rhône reds, especially Syrah. They shape his winemaking philosophy – wines of place, and he wants to produce reds with finesse and elegance that don't come across as wimpy.

A major trophy or a manga feature?

In 2011, Nick achieved something quite remarkable. His 2010 Mon Pere Shiraz, a wine paying homage to his father, won the Jimmy Watson Memorial Trophy, arguably the most prestigious prize on the Australian wine show circuit. It was the first time a Tasmanian wine had taken out the award. Shiraz can struggle to ripen there, but Nick sources the fruit mostly from two vineyards planted in the early 1970s and makes it like Pinot Noir – with some whole bunches in the ferment – and the result is a highly perfumed, medium-bodied and spicy wine.

But Nick's wines haven't featured in an influential manga comic-book series. Ben's Amon-Ra has. In a famous Japanese comic about wine, *The Drops of God*, the lead character has to identify 13 wines, 12 known as apostles and one called the Drops of God. The 2003 Amon Ra is the seventh apostle.

Ben had no idea the wine was to be featured: "It came out of the blue. I didn't know about it until my distributor rang and said: 'You've made it'." He says the image in the comic book of the bald bloke in the vineyard is a good rendition. "And, yes, I'm constantly reminded I haven't won a Jimmy, but I'd go with the manga any day."

Aussie battlers

Apparently, there was no sibling rivalry in the Glaetzer household. All highly intelligent, Nick and Sam were more studious, while middle brother Ben had the most charisma. Maybe that's why he got away with occasionally giving his younger brother Nick a "dead arm" – punching him until he was so sore he couldn't feel anything. "Well, younger siblings can be a pain in the arse."

Today, with families of their own, they are good friends. So what do they like in each other's wines?

Nick on Ben's wines: "His purity of fruit and the balance and texture. It would be so easy to have gone overboard with more alcohol and more oak, like other, bigger names in the Barossa, but he hasn't. His wines are restrained. I love Barossa Shiraz and I get a delight showing Ben's wines to my Tasmanian friends who like the richer styles."

Ben on Nick's wines: "I never get to taste them because he doesn't send me any. I have to raid Colin's cellar just to try them! OK, Nick says I have purity of fruit, I think he has a focus on quality and purity; it's a common theme between us. Barossa fruit is rich and generous and I try to make wines with restraint and elegance and palate structure. Nick's Shirazes are like that with a lot of secondary characters, more aromatics and he's looking to express the variety as he sees it in Tasmania."