



Potting a lifestyle

When it comes to wine regions, Langhorne Creek is without a doubt South Australia's quiet achiever. It's not big and bold, but rather it's friendly and approachable, in much the same way as its wines are.

Story Nicole Haack
Photography Sarah Long

Langhorne Creek is stamping its claim on the wine scene, locally, nationally, and internationally, not by screaming from the rooftops, but by representing quality and consistency. It's not only one of Australia's oldest wine regions, dating back to 1850, but it also has a strong heritage of producing outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz.

Situated less than an hour from Adelaide, on the banks of the Bremer River in South Australia's stunning Fleurieu Peninsula, 'the Creek', as it's affectionately known, is home to a proud history of family-owned and run vineyards and wineries.

One of the jewels in the crown is the historic Metala property, which is this year celebrating 125 years of family ownership. Husband and wife team Guy and Liz Adams are the proud custodians of the land once owned and managed by Guy's great, great grandfather – the same land that has for many years produced the grapes for the award-winning Metala Shiraz.

"The on-site cellar was shut down by my grandfather in 1952," Guy recalls. "He decided it was more efficient for the grapes to be transported to Stonyfell, which was then owned by his brother-in-law."

Shortly afterwards Stonyfell was taken over by Dalgetty's and, sadly, a business oversight saw the family lose the Metala wine trademark. It's been bought and sold ever since, and is now a part of the massive Foster's empire. Guy and Liz still supply the grapes for the estate label Metala, but nowadays the pair are kicking goals of their own, having launched the Brother in Arms wine label in 1998.

"It started out as a hobby with my late father, who loved his red wine," Guy says. "Liz and I realised it had become a business entity when in 2001, 50 years after the original wine cellar shut down, we decided to build our own winery.

"By that stage we'd begun exporting to the US and our Shiraz was being extremely well received, including excellent scores from (prominent international wine critic) Robert Parker."

Buoyed by that reception and a desire to take a little slice of Langhorne Creek heaven to the world, the couple, with young son Miles in tow, worked around the clock to create a winery in just four months.

"Out of the dust and mud came a 300 tonne boutique winery," Liz proudly recalls. "Miles had a play area in the boot of the car and every so often he'd hop down and carry tools around to everyone."

Guy acknowledges it was a tough time, but one that also set them up for the future.

"If we stopped and thought about what we were trying to achieve we would have gone nuts, but if you want to succeed and are driven to make your mark, there's no choice but to make sure it happens."

Armed with a mantra of refusing to fail and equipped with vines that are up to 116 years' old, it's hardly surprising Brother in Arms is being noticed, not just on home soil but in New Zealand, the US, Canada, Europe, the UK, Hong Kong and most recently in China.

Current releases include the 2002 Brothers in Arms Shiraz, which was awarded a Silver Medal at the recent International Wine Challenge in London, and has been a hit with restaurateurs because it's released as an aged wine that's "food ready".

"In the industry at the moment a lot of wines are 2005/2006 and five star restaurants are saying we're producing world-class food and we need to be able to match the wines – our 2002 Shiraz fits the bill perfectly," Guy says.

The Brother in Arms label also showcases the 2004 No 6 Shiraz Cabernet, which secured a Silver Medal at the Decanter Wine Awards in London earlier this year. It's a wine that has special meaning for the family, with the 'No 6' label created as a celebration of Guy and Liz's children, Miles, 8, and Emily, 4, who are now the sixth generation to live on the Metala property.

While as parents they're philosophical about whether their children will follow in their footsteps, both Guy and Liz are passionate about ensuring they leave the legacy of a property and a business that is healthy.

"We'll support the kids in whatever path they choose, but we certainly look at this property as being a long, long-term investment," Guy says. "We spend a lot of time being green, planting bushland, and being environmentally balanced and sustainable."

Aside from managing a 750 acre vineyard and a winery that now produces 25,000 cases a year, Guy and Liz are also managing the farm side of their business on a day-to-day basis, including merino sheep and broad-acre farming.

"I don't call myself a farmer – I call myself a small business operator," Guy says. "Last week we were in Shanghai selling wine and this week we're shearing lambs."

While the pair remain committed to diversification, there's little doubt the wine is a driving passion.

Liz knows exactly what they're trying to achieve and despite the relentless working hours, is clearly very 'at home' with it.

"Our wine is giving us an opportunity to showcase our property," she says. "We produce it ourselves from soil to bottle. When people buy one of our wines, they buy a little piece of our lifestyle. It's Langhorne Creek in a bottle."

It's a pride that comes without even a hint of arrogance – an attitude that is reflective of Langhorne Creek. This quiet achiever may not have received the attention of other notable wine icons, such as the Barossa Valley, the Clare Valley, the Coonawarra and McLaren Vale, but there is every reason why that should change.