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PLACE

GUMPARA SHIRAZ AN ICON SLAYER

GUMPARA WINES RESERVE SHIRAZ 2010

“Mark Mader might run a one-man-band operation, but he know’s how to take on the big boys.”



JOY WALTERFANG

YOU WOULD HAVE TO SAY Gumpara wines are the quintessential one-man-band operation; with the man in question being Mark Mader. “From tending all the vines right through to the final bottling - I just about do everything myself,” Mader told *Winestate*. So for his 2010 Reserve Shiraz to come third out of 726 wines exhibited in the Great Shiraz Challenge, it meant he had to beat the socks off some of the country’s super premium iconic wines. That is certainly no mean feat.

When I rang Mader on his mobile to give him the good news he was out in the vineyard pruning in the rain. There were a few minutes of stunned silence at the other end of the phone then he burst out with: “Wow that’s fantastic. Crikey! I was a bit unsure whether to submit that wine because I thought it might have been a bit too young, but I reckon 2010 is the best year I’ve seen out of the Barossa - it has been one out-of-the-box”.

If you are planning to get on Mader’s mailing list you had better be quick because he only made 2000 litres of that particular wine. “I have only just ordered the labels for them,” he said. Modest Mader maintains such a low profile that apart from a few out-of-date blogs on the internet there is very little to be found about the man behind the Gumpara label. “We are from the original German settlers in the Barossa. My descendents came out here in 1845 and purchased land for a vineyard in the Light Pass area, which has been in the family ever since,” he said. Mader is now the sixth-generation custodian of that vineyard. “We have around about 70 acres of fruit with some lovely old vines that are between 50 and 80-years-old and some that are over 90,” he said.

Most of Mader’s grapes go to Peter Lehmann wines, but each year he also produces about 500 cases of wine under his own Gumpara label. “Initially, making wine under my own label started out as a bit of a hobby, but over the last few years,



with grape prices having been so low, it has helped supplement lost income," he said. "I put my 2008 Reserve Shiraz in last year's Great Shiraz Challenge and I was really pleased when it was awarded four-stars. I always try to make the very best quality wines I possibly can from the very best quality fruit I can grow and make sure everything is done properly; no short cuts. Things started tightening up for us in 2001 and since then it has been a bit of a balancing act, but things began to improve for us last year." It has taken a while to get to the stage Mader is at now, but all the belt tightening and hard yakka is beginning to pay off.

"My wines are made off-site as I just don't have the equipment to do it here at home, although I do make my fortifieds here because they are only small, one-tonne batches," he said. "I focus on making wines that will age well. They can be drunk when released but they definitely benefit with some age on them."

Mader believes bad times for the wine industry have finally plateaued and from now on things should start moving forward. He doesn't see it as a magical overnight transformation but a long, slow process; a time of correction, with bad vineyards being pulled out. "But then I have always been an optimist," he said. Mader doesn't have to worry about appointing a distributor for his wine as it moves out the door almost quicker than he can make it. "My wines are starting to get quite a following, particularly in Melbourne," he said. "I also have buyers in Queensland and New South Wales but, believe it or not, don't sell much here in South Australia. I'm in a few restaurants but not in bottle shops."

Mader has tried his hand at exporting and has sold wine to China, the US and Japan, and still exports a small amount to Singapore. "Because I only make a limited amount, I haven't had to rely on the export market," he said. "I suppose

it's a good position to be in." Mader has the capability of taking the next step; getting bigger - making more wine, but as he said: "I am really happy and comfortable with the lifestyle I have now. I have a young family and I want to spend time with them and not be tied up with work, work, work!"

So will there be a 7th generation vigneron in the family? "I don't know, I haven't got a crystal ball and I'm certainly not going to push my kids in that direction," he said. "Hopefully if they don't take over the vineyard themselves, in the future, they will get a manager in and keep it in the family."

As I was about to go, he stopped me: "So how many wines was it again in the shiraz challenge? Mmm and I came third - wow that's really good," he mused.

PS: Check out the Semillon & Blends tasting in this issue. Gumpara's 2010 Old Vine Barossa Semillon was awarded four stars. Bargain price, too!