

BEN RIGGS

WINEMAKER

After 25 years of winemaking experience, 14 of which were spent at Wirra Wirra in McLaren Vale, winemaker Ben Riggs is now well established under his own banner.

As business partner with friend Tony Parkinson, Ben operates out of the Galvanized WineGroup, formally created in 2006 to encompass brands Mr. Riggs, Penny's Hill, The BlackChook and Woop Woop. In addition, Ben consulted in the South of France for Cazal Viel and still does to other local wineries such as Pertaringa and Geoff Hardy, Zonte's Footstep, Jip Jip Rocks, Journey's End and the highly acclaimed Tatiarra wines from the Heathcote region of Victoria.

Ben is sought to source fruit and make commercial batches of wine for wholesale and retail entities in Australia and abroad. His consultancy work provides a "grape to plate" approach ranging from vineyard inspections and winemaking to liaison with wine journalists, retailers and restaurateurs.

Ben has successfully entered the arena of producer under the distinctive self-styled moniker, "Mr. Riggs". Commencing with McLaren Vale Shiraz from those growers with whom rapport had been developed over many local vintages, the Mr Riggs label has now found its way into Shiraz Viognier, Viognier, Sticky End Viognier, Tempranillo, Coonawarra Cabernet, a Watervale Riesling and to Ben's great delight, a cool climate Riesling made in the old world style.

The 2001 vintage Riggs-crafted McLaren Vale Shiraz set the trade abuzz and Ben is now under pressure from merchants for a place in the allocation queue for Mr Riggs wines. Limited production of "vineyard specific" wines ensures market exclusivity. These boutique wines are made in quantities from 250 to 1,000 cases at most. Made in larger quantities are the Shiraz Viognier and the recent release, "The Gaffer" Shiraz, a blend of high quality McLaren Vale Shiraz.



And, yes. Ben does have a vineyard. Located at Kangarilla on the edge of the McLaren Vale designated region, "Piebald Gully" is a recently planted patch producing fine grade Shiraz, Viognier and Petit Verdot from low yielding hand tended vines. Along with business partner, Tony Parkinson, Ben is winemaker and partner in the hugely successful Woop Woop brand. At the instigation of its third partner, US importer, Ben Hammerschlag, Woop Woop was developed in 2002 to fill a niche in the US market for a value-priced Australian Shiraz.

Woop Woop Shiraz was named by the "New York Times" in 2003 as the best wine and best value for money Australian Shiraz in a selected tasting of Australian Shiraz offerings across all price points.

In 2008, the Woop Woop range now includes a Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and a Verdehlo, (affectionately known by its followers as the Woop Woop “V”) and has established success in other markets such as the UK, Canada and Korea.

2004 saw the addition of The Black Chook, a Shiraz Viognier blend, which has enjoyed fast success in the United States, Canada and Australia, with new markets knocking on doors regularly. This range has already grown in response to market demand and includes a highly sought after Sparkling Shiraz and recently a white blend of Viognier, Marsanne and Roussanne.

Wines made by Ben have achieved considerable Wine Show Award success including winning the first two Great Australian Shiraz Challenges. More than 20 trophies have been won and in 1993, Wirra Wirra 1991 “Angelus” was declared the overall winner of the Sydney International Top 100 wine awards. More recently, the 2010 Sydney International Wine Competition awarded Blue Gold to the 2008 Penny’s Hill ‘Cracking Black’ Shiraz and the inaugural Hong King International Wine & Spirit Competition presented the 2007 Mr. Riggs ‘Yacca Paddock’ Tempranillo with the trophy for Best Tempranillo and Blends and the Mr. Riggs 2007 Piebald Shiraz Viognier with a gold medal.

As a winemaker, Ben achieved Bushing King status in 2000 and has again been crowned with this unique title for 2005/06 when the 2004 Penny’s Hill Shiraz was awarded winner of the show. This award recognises the maker of the best wine at the McLaren Vale Wine Show. The 2004 Penny’s Hill Shiraz was also awarded outright winner of the 2006 Australian Boutique Wine Awards.

In 2004, the first release of the Mr. Riggs Shiraz Viognier won first place at The Hyatt South Australian Consumers’ Choice Wine of the Year Awards. And the official judges didn’t think it was too bad either, awarding this wine runner up in its category! The 2004 Shiraz Viognier went on to win the Best Shiraz of Show at the Australian Boutique Wine Awards in 2005. June 2005 saw Ben as one of only 8 finalists for the Qantas/Gourmet Traveller Winemaker of the Year award. This publication shows prestigious recognition of his contribution to the wine industry over the previous 12 months.

Besides 25 vintages in Australia, Ben has presided over a further eight overseas. Experience has been gained in the Napa Valley, Bordeaux, Greece, Italy and the South of France which gives Ben a broad appreciation of wine styles and winemaking practices. He has also judged the Melbourne Wine Show for 10 years, Hyatt Wine of the Year for 5 years, and the McLaren Vale and Riverland Wine Shows for 2 years.

A graduate of Roseworthy (in 1985), Ben has made a major contribution to regional wine industry activities having served 10 years as a board member of McLaren Vale Winemakers Inc. Three of those years saw Ben in the role of Chairman. He also chaired the McLaren Vale Wine Show over a 5 year period.

Married to Annie with sons, Baxter, Austin and Nelson, Ben is committed to championing McLaren Vale’s global Shiraz reputation. It is that passion which is driving him to do things his way and showcase not just the region’s greatest winegrape variety but to give free rein to his particular winemaking and wine marketing skills.

