

SMALL PACKAGES

THE BEKKERS FAVOUR QUALITY OVER VOLUME AND A RESTRAINED APPROACH IN THE WINERY.

Toby Bekkers' grandfather grew up in McLaren Vale, owning a property in Reynella, and worked in the region's historic Reynell cellars. Stories of his grandfather's time in the wine trade peppered the young Bekkers' childhood and set him on a path to craft what are undoubtedly benchmarks in modern Australian winemaking.

Before embarking on viticultural studies Bekkers began his career working for David Paxton, spending his school then university holidays pruning and working around vineyards. Paxton has been a leading viticulturist in Australia for almost 40 years and there were few better viticultural training grounds than his.

After graduating from university and continuing his work for Paxton, Bekkers became increasingly interested in the growing field of organic and biodynamic grape growing, although at first he was far from convinced. "At Paxton we saw many wines we liked that were BD farmed. Although somewhat sceptical, we decided to trial it and were very impressed with the results."

While viticulture was clearly his home ground, Bekkers also entertained the idea of stepping into the winery and taking on the challenge not only to grow but to craft great Australian wines. An early stroke of luck catapulted him in that direction.

During a vintage at Tintara in McLaren Vale a French winemaker, who was working for Hardy's in France and had travelled south for the vintage, was digging out a fermenter and needed a helping hand to get out. Bekkers reached in and Emmanuelle, his future wife and business partner, emerged.

After continuing their careers Emmanuelle and Toby came to their now-or-never moment. They quit their jobs, packed up their family and moved to France for almost a year. "Emmanuelle and I were able to spend time planning for what we'd do on our return to Australia and visiting some great contacts Emma had built up over the years through many vintages." It was a seminal moment in the creation of not only Bekkers wine but also the philosophies that would underlie it. They would return to Australia and try to mirror the great wine estates of the world.

Bekkers volumes are small enough that the husband-and-wife team can oversee every part of production, sales and marketing. You can find them at the cellar door hosting tastings before returning to the vineyard for winter pruning.

Only select vineyards are chosen, most of them managed under organic and biodynamic principles and owned or part-owned by Bekkers. Fruit is sourced from lower elevations in McLaren Vale, close to the coast with shallow, sandy soils for their structure and density, which he blends with later-ripening Clarendon and Blewitt Springs fruit, that adds trademark detailed aromatic complexity.

The wines are different from the traditionally big, plush and opulent local style that has made McLaren Vale famous, and this is as much due to fruit sourcing and picking as to the approach in the winery. Rather than extract as much flavour, tannin and colour as



NICK CUBBIN

possible, the Bekkers are more restrained. "Take your time, extract from the grapes what you need and leave behind what you don't. A light touch goes a long way when your fruit is naturally generous." This approach only comes from a well-earned confidence in the winery and vineyard that the Bekkers team have built up through hard work and experience.

The Bekkers range is made up of just four wines: three from McLaren Vale made from syrah and grenache, and a mailing list exclusive Premier Cru chablis that not only keeps Emmanuelle and her family in touch with their roots but also provides a tremendous foil to the wines of McLaren Vale.

The grape at the core of the Bekkers label is grenache. "Many regions fashion great shiraz but with grenache we have the opportunity to deliver something clearly unique," Toby Bekkers says, adding that grenache is similar to pinot noir, being more affected by vintage and vineyard than shiraz.

While grenache and the grenache blend are the stars at Bekkers, the whole range is a picture of beautifully detailed wines that show tremendous concentration as well as elegance and subtlety. Emmanuelle and Toby's plan, hatched in France, was to create a new star in McLaren Vale that would help to redefine Australia's place in the global fine wine market. They have succeeded. **W**

BEKKERS SYRAH GRENACHE 2016

Bright opaque ruby in colour, this is a multilayered and reserved style showing superb complexity with dark cherry, ripe blackberry, eucalyptus, spice, meat, leather and tobacco laced fruits supported by superbly integrated new oak. Dry, full-bodied and savoury on the palate, the wine shows understated power, finishing very long with significant tannins providing long ageing potential.

BEKKERS CHABLIS 1ER CRU VAILLONS 2015

A classically styled, understated chablis showing flinty, honeydew melon, citrus and green apple fruit. Light bodied and acid-driven, it is juicy and currently a little closed, needing some time in the cellar to fill out – but is already delightful drinking.

BEKKERS GRENACHE 2016

Bright and beautifully pure grenache aromas of dark cherry, raspberry, tobacco, earth and spice are supported by creamy vanillin oak. Silky yet powerful, it is a tannic style with excellent length that needs time to show its best.