



Our Feature story: Mount Pleasant (Hunter Valley, New south Wales, Australia)



**MOUNT
PLEASANT**

Renewing a Legacy: Drawing upon a century of heritage and unique terroir to craft the finest wines Adrian Sparks, Chief Winemaker

The Mount Pleasant name is synonymous in Australia with Maurice O'Shea and the Hunter Valley. Established by Maurice O'Shea in 1921, who in addition to planting new vineyards bought vineyards planted by Charles King back in 1880, the winery was taken over by the McWilliams family in 1940. It lost focus over succeeding decades, until it was bought by new owners in 2021, who have invested heavily to revive and evolve its reputation and quality as it enters a second century. Just the 5th Chief Winemaker in the winery's history, Adrian Sparks joined in 2012, and became chief winemaker in 2015. Under his guidance, the winery has returned to its roots of producing singular, high-quality table wines.

(Interviewer: Dion Lenting (Kiwi Copy) July 2023)

◆ Let's start with the Hunter Valley climate and topography, because it is not a place you expect to be a winegrowing area.

— Actually, it was the first winegrowing region in Australia when grapes were first planted here in 1828. That was nearly 200 years ago, and it has proven to be successful. It seems an anomaly considering how warm it gets, but there is something about the humidity and the valley itself that lends to beautiful flavours at earlier baumes. It is often the first region picked in Australia starting in late January. If you pick Semillon in the Hunter Valley at 10.5 baume you get beautiful citrus flavours, the acidity is perfect, everything is in balance. Maybe it is a combination of overcast conditions and humidity, but it doesn't get too hot, and it doesn't get too cold. If you pick Semillon at 10.5 baume anywhere else in the world you're getting green capsicum juice.



For the grapes, there is just something about this place that is special, how the valley and the winds flow, and we are very fortunate to have a mountain range close behind us so the sun is setting nice and early. We're in shade by 5-5:30 in the afternoon in the middle of summer, and those extra hours protected from that belting afternoon sun is what we need. It is such a small region, we are less than 1 percent of the Australian wine industry. Looking at the number of Hunter Valley wines that have been honoured by Langtons is a testament to all the people who went before us, planting the grapes and knowing what they were doing.

◆ You have 4 vineyards with 3 distinct soil profiles in them?

— Coming into this region there are all sorts of bits and pieces. Our Lovedale Vineyard (Map ①) is planted on sandier soils which produce lighter, more aromatic wines, which is certainly true with our Semillon compared to other Semillons around the valley. For the reds, Rosehill (Map ②) has red soils over a limestone base which produces very fine wines, very elegant and red fruited. Here on the estate in the Old Paddock (Map ③) and Old Hill (Map ④) vineyards there are old volcanic soils with deep-rooted vines. The Old Hill vineyard was originally 3ha of vines, which was a big planting for 1880, and the roots are 3 to 4 meters deep. We didn't have irrigation until

2002, so for 120 years they were all hand watered, if they were watered at all. They have seen everything. When my grandma was born in 1920 they were already 40 years old. And it is funny, you look at our old vines here at Mount Pleasant and they are not those huge, big thick trunks that twist like you see in photos in the Barossa, they are just a different shape. The Old Paddock started with 0.7ha planted by Maurice O'Shea in 1921, and is the oldest Pinot Noir vineyard in Australia. Overall, I think we have the largest area of vines over 50 years old in Australia.

◆ What are the yields from the old vines like?

— You would expect them to be super small, but for the 3 hectares at Old Hill we are getting 3 tons a hectare, a ton and a half per acre which is pretty high. However, it is one thing to talk about yield, but you have to look at canopy size and whether it has the ability to ripen whatever the vine is producing, and it certainly does. The oldest vines are about 1.5 tons (per acre) and the younger ones 2.5 tons, which is low, but it is all about fruit intensity and power. We prefer a small vintage with powerful wines

◆ How do channel the heritage created by Maurice O'Shea into what you are doing today?

— Maurice is the grandfather of winemaking in Australia. As a 15-year-old he was put on a boat and sent to France to study winemaking at Montpellier University, which was amazing. He came back with a huge appreciation for table wines. Back then, the focus was mostly on fortified wines in Australia, so he introduced wines to enjoy with food and he did it beautifully. Some of his wines are Australia's greatest, in Halliday's 'Top 5 Wines he's ever tasted' two are from Mount Pleasant. He passed away in 1956, and 3 months later electricity was put on in the winery. He did it without electricity, collaborating with friends and family.

He had a lot of friends, he loved entertaining, he loved cooking, he loved art. He is someone who dedicated his life to the Australian wine industry and made it a greater place, he bought something to the wine table that Australia had never seen. He was so far ahead of his time. Today there is very little oak in our wines, the winemaking has been taken right out of the mix. It is all about where the wines are from, the Hunter Valley, Mount Pleasant and the vineyard.

PICK UP WINE

CODE
12227

Mount Pleasant Hunter Valley Semillon 2022 (Screwcap)

Variety: Semillon
Alc. 10.5%

RRP ¥3,000



Semillon fruit was picked early before the sugar content rises, gently pressed, allowed to settle, then fermented at low temperatures for 14 days. Aged on lees for 2 months. Refreshing aromas of freshly squeezed lemon and lime. Crisp acidity pierces through the citrus flavours, the finish is clean and dry. 95pts James Halliday

CODE
12501

Mount Pleasant Hunter Valley Semillon Elizabeth 2017 (Screwcap)

Variety: Semillon
Alc. 10.5%

RRP ¥3,500



Enhancing the citrus flavours, 5 years of bottle aging before release in 2023 gave time for complex nuances and richness to develop, including straw, nuts, honey, and toast, together with a smooth viscosity. A premium Hunter Semillon that will age well for 20+ years. 95pts James Halliday

*Same wine as Cellar Aged Elizabeth Semillon S'17 (#11865) but with a new label.



All wines are 750ml unless otherwise specified. Prices do not include Consumption Tax.

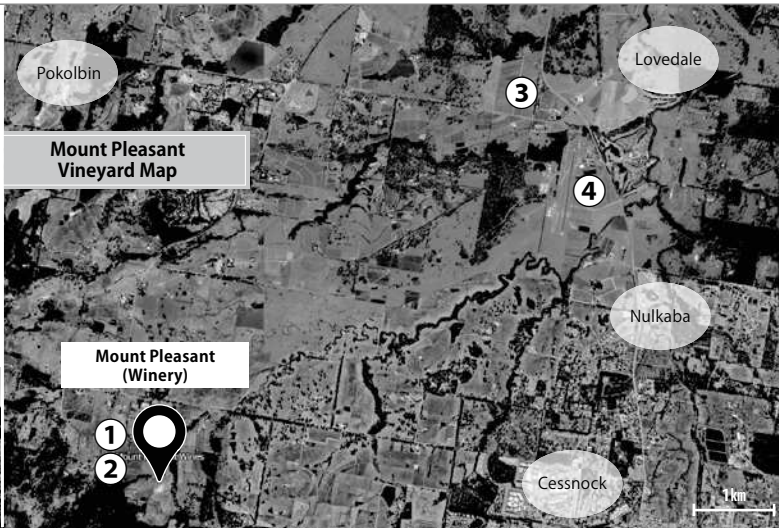
Village Cellars Wine Catalogue 2023 Autumn

① Old Paddock Vineyard
Planted: 1921~
Soil: Red and yellow podzolic soil over clay*
Elevation: 60-100m; Area: 15.85ha
Adjacent to Old Hill Vineyard. Planted by Maurice O'Shea

② Old Hill Vineyard
Planted: 1880~
Soil: Red and yellow podzolic soil over clays
Elevation: 60-100m; Area: 12.3ha
Includes Shiraz vines planted in 1880
Australia's oldest Pinot Noir planted in 1921, including the Mother Vine for Pinot (MV6)


*Podzolic soil: Leached soil formed in broadleaf forest and can contain clay and iron.



③ Lovedale Vineyard
Planted: 1946~
Soil: Sandy aggregate loam topsoil, with friable red and yellow clay lower root zones
Elevation: 60m; Area: 31.1ha
White varietals vineyard planted by Maurice O'Shea

④ Rosehill Vineyard
Planted: 1946~
Soil: Rich volcanic loam
Elevation: 60-100m; Area: 28.6ha
Red varietals vineyard planted by Maurice O'Shea



Maurice O'Shea

◆ You've been at Mount Pleasant for 10 years. How have things evolved since you first joined?

— Yes, this year was my 9th vintage. There was a big change of the guard in 2013, when Phil Ryan retired after 30 years and a lot of knowledge and history went with him. Jim Chatto and I arrived about the same time, and for us it was about understanding the past and what we wanted to achieve in the future with Mount Pleasant. There was a lot of talk about the wines being too oaky over the years which was a sign of the times rather than anything else. We were also determined to shine a light on our blocks, and the significance of those sites, making and bottling them separately so people could taste a patch right down to a specific part of a block. Jim started that and left at the end of 2016, and it is something I have been conscious of over time. It is important that people who drink Mount Pleasant wine feel that it is a 'Rosehill', 'Old Paddock' or 'Old Hill' wine rather than an 'Adrian Sparks' wine.

◆ Can you tell me more about the new investments?

— Around 2012-13 we put in small fermenters and started making smaller lots, with a focus on quality. Long-time owners McWilliams went into administration and then in May 2021 new owners purchased Mount Pleasant and made huge changes. There was a lot of investment in the vineyards which had been a little bit neglected over the time, and new equipment in the winery including state-of-the-art sorting equipment. At the end of the day it is farming. We are at the hands of the weather gods, and they provide what the wines ultimately look like, so we need to work as a team to make sure that we are doing everything in the vineyards to ensure we are making the greatest possible fruit, and from there ultimately the greatest possible wines we can make. Our new cellar door with its mix of art, food and wine is a place to experience, learn and understand more about Mount Pleasant. We also have new branding, we bought back Maurice O'Shea's original family crest on the label, to make sure what we did was honouring the past. We have also been very proactive working to make sure the brand is held in high regard as one of Australia's most famous wineries that the world needs to experience.

◆ What are the characteristics that make Hunter Valley Semillon, Shiraz and Pinot Noir unique?

— Definitely the climate. Semillon is lighter framed, bottled within 3-4 months of picking. The beauty of Hunter Valley Semillon is bottle age and the characters that evolve in the bottle over time. Shiraz is medium-bodied, and 13 to 13.5 percent alcohol wines that are pure, powerful and intense, yet restrained, refined, elegant and balanced, savoury wines that are beautiful to drink now. I truly believe Hunter Valley reds age better than wines from any other state in Australia. The Pinot Noir vineyard was planted by Maurice in 1921 using cuttings taken from the original Busby collections. From that block the MV6 clone was isolated, and has now gone on to propagate 60 percent of Australia's premium Pinot production. It is used all through Tasmania and Yarra Valley, and they stem from that one vine in that block, the Mothervine.

◆ What happened with the 2020 vintage and the fires?

— It was tough. There were fires burning on the range 15 kilometers south of here, and we were blanketed by smoke all day for over two months, getting covered in ash. There were days you couldn't see the sky because it was so orange. We did a lot testing with laboratories, and even mini-ferments, but they all stunk of smoke, and ultimately we made the decision not to pick. We are trying to build up a reputation for making great wines so we can't risk that. Financially it was devastating, long-term it was the right decision to make.

◆ How is the 2023 vintage shaping up?

— Amazingly. I gave it a 10 out of 10, on a par with the 2014 and 2018 in terms of greatest vintages. If you had asked me in early September last year what it is going to be like, I would have said it is going to be a write-off, we had so much rain, but then it stayed cool and dried out. We harvested 3 weeks later than usual, and all that extra time on the vine is flavour, power and tannin accumulation. Beautiful, beautiful wines from a cool summer. Amazing quality of fruit, colour and aromatics, so it is going to be good for both whites and reds.

PICK UP WINE

CODE 12637
Mount Pleasant Hunter Valley Shiraz 2018 (Screwcap)
Variety: Shiraz
Alc. 13.6%

RRP ¥ **3,500**

A blend of grapes from three estate vineyards – Old Hill, Old Paddock and Rosehill. A typical medium-bodied Hunter Shiraz with a perfect balance of fruit and acidity, showing fresh red and black berry and spice flavours, and a fine tannin structure.
95pts & Gold Medal, 2022 Hunter Valley Wine Show



CODE 12635
Mount Pleasant Mount Henry Shiraz Pinot Noir 2021 (Screwcap)
Variety: Shiraz/Pinot Noir
Alc. 13.4%

RRP ¥ **5,600**

The first Shiraz-Pinot blend in Australia was made by Maurice O'Shea in 1937, and revived by Mount Pleasant in the late 1990s. A blend of Pinot Noir from 100-year old vines with Shiraz, the Shiraz fruitiness and powerful Pinot tannins are in perfect balance. Only 200 dozen produced.
94pts James Halliday

