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WINE by John Lewis
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Inspired idea bears fruit with a great red



WINE
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Thanks to the passion and determination of a Hunter winemaker, two legends of old live on.

THE Thomas Hardy 1958 Reserve Bin C184 St Thomas Burgundy and the Thomas Hardy 1964 and 1966 Private Bin Burgundy were Hunter-McLaren Vale blends and are rated among Australia's greatest red wines.

Iain Riggs is one of the greatest admirers of that series of blends of Hunter and McLaren Vale shiraz and 20 years ago they inspired him to try to create present-day, super-premium versions.

His passion was not surprising, given that his wine career has been divided between McLaren Vale and the Hunter, but his initial efforts failed.

In 1989 and 1990 Iain had discussions with Hardy's about re-creating the wines using the best barrels from Brokenwood's shiraz and the best from Hardy's McLaren Vale sources.

Nothing eventuated, so Iain – managing director-chief winemaker of Brokenwood Wines and current chairman of judges for the Sydney

and Hunter Valley wine shows – decided to go it alone.

The plan was to make a 50-50 40-dozen-bottle blend using the best barrel of Brokenwood's Graveyard vineyard at Pokolbin and the best barrel of McLaren Vale shiraz from 50-year-old vines in the Rayner vineyard at Blewitt Springs.

The wines were only to be released when 10 years old and only if they met the most stringent standards.

The Brokenwood team produced a trial blend in the 1994 vintage, but the wine didn't come up to the required standard and neither did a 1995 effort.

On its 10th birthday the 1996 did pass the test and in 2007 was released as the Brokenwood 1996 HBA Shiraz at \$180 a bottle. Appropriately the wine was launched at a Melbourne luncheon at which guests were treated to a tasting of the still-superb Hardy's 1958 Reserve Bin C184 St Thomas Burgundy and the Hardy's 1964 and

1966 Private Bin Burgundy.

The HBA tag honours the three founders of Brokenwood – James Halliday, John Beeston and Tony Albert.

In 1970 Tony Albert, who died in 2000, joined fellow Sydney lawyers James Halliday and John Beeston in forming the original Brokenwood partnership and paying what was considered to be an outrageously high price for a four-hectare scrub-covered Pokolbin block next to the Hungerford Hill vineyard.

The inaugural 1996 HBA wine was only available at the McDonalds Road, Pokolbin, cellar door.

In 1997 no attempt was made to produce an HBA, but a 1998 passed muster and has now been released at \$200 a bottle. It is reviewed today in *Uncorked* and can only be bought at the Pokolbin cellar door.

The hefty price doesn't seem to have deterred buyers, as half of the 40-dozen-bottle production run has already been sold.

Like the 1996, the 1998 is a 50-50 blend of Graveyard and Rayner vineyard shiraz.

The Graveyard material had mainly French oak maturation, while the McLaren Vale component grapes were crushed in McLaren Vale, the juice trucked chilled to Pokolbin and fermented in open vats, then given mainly American oak hogshead maturation.

The Rayner vineyard was planted



EARLY DAYS: Brokenwood founders, from left, Tony Albert, John Beeston and James Halliday pictured as a backdrop to the HBA Shiraz.

up to 50 years ago on a spur of deep Blewitt Springs sand at McLaren Vale by the late David Rayner, who had worked with Iain Riggs when he was managing the Hazelmere winery at McLaren Vale in the early 1980s.

When Iain moved from Hazelmere to the Hunter in 1983 to become chief winemaker-managing director of Brokenwood, he maintained his close association with David and the Brokenwood Rayner shiraz wines made their first appearance in the 1983 vintage.

Brokenwood's access to Rayner grapes ended with the 2006 vintage

because the vineyard was sold to Wirra Wirra Wines at the end of 2007.

Iain Riggs says he has an excellent alternative McLaren Vale source in the Wade vineyard, owned by Derek and Raylene Wade, which has been supplying Brokenwood with shiraz, sauvignon blanc and chardonnay fruit since 2001.

There are HBAs in the pipeline from the 1999 and 2000 vintages and later quality checks will determine if there will be ones from 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2008.

Wade vineyard fruit has replaced the Rayner component from 2006 on.