

Grape visionaries reap what they sow

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By John Jens

Comments:



Virginia Willcock and Paul Holmes a Court barrel sampling at the Vasse Felix winery in Margaret River.

IT is a new generation but Holmes a Court visions are once again having an exciting impact on West Australian life.

The first was Dr Thomas Brendan Cullity, who planted the first commercial vineyard in the Margaret River bush.

The second is the focused and meticulous Paul Holmes a Court who purchased the winery to achieve his visions for the winery and the region.

The Moss Wood, Cullen and Leeuwin wineries have had more famous and better reviewed brands than Vasse Felix, but the change began with the arrival of winemaker Virginia Willcock in 2006.

In her, Holmes a Court found an able kindred spirit and ally to share what has become their joint vision for Vasse Felix – to produce great wines from cabernet and chardonnay and to provide the spark around which Margaret River wine industry could coalesce and work more closely to improve both its wine and its international significance.

In 2007, confirming their status as the region's founding winery, Paul and his wife Zara invited the region's other four pioneering wineries to co-host an 80-person black tie dinner at Vasse Felix in honour of Tom Cullity and to mark the area's 40th year of commercial wine production.

Willcock and Holmes a Court recently hosted a tasting of five vintages of chardonnay, five vintages of Heytesbury chardonnay, 10 vintages of cabernet sauvignon and five vintages of Heytesbury Red – and in each the next to be released vintage was included.

This tasting was momentous in that it confirmed, as they must have suspected, that Vasse Felix has evolved to the level that it is now producing the equal of Margaret River's greatest cabernets and chardonnays.

With ever improving winemaking and viticultural refinements, and better vineyards, the two to three greatest wines in Vasse Felix's history, under each of these four labels, have been made in the last three or four vintages – with the possible exception of legendary Tom Cullity made 1979 cabernet sauvignon.

The soon to be released 2010 cabernet sauvignon \$40 and 18.4 points (and 2009 18.2 points) is the best wine under this label.