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Australian vintner keeps Badger accent

Posted: May 17, 2008

On Wine



Anne Schamberg
E-MAIL

If you are from Wisconsin, you might want to say so when you visit the Stanley Lambert winery in Australia's Barossa Valley.

"Wisconsin visitors actually get special treatment. If I'm not already there, they call me up and I come in to see them," said winery owner Jim Lambert. "They get a VIP tour. If they want, they come out to the vineyard and get a special tour."

That is, unless this Wisconsin native is back home visiting friends and family. (And it was during his recent visit to Milwaukee that I met him and tasted the latest releases from Stanley Lambert.)

Lambert grew up on a farm in Manitowoc and attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he earned a couple of degrees in engineering. It was in Madison that he met his wife, Pam, who is from Baraboo.

The 20,000-case-a-year, boutique winery is not the first enterprise this 54-year old has taken on. His most successful project was Dot Hill, a California-based data-storage company, which he founded.

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He stepped down in 2006, after 20 years as CEO. And that's when he and Pam made the move Down Under.

"I wanted to do something different," he said. "I wanted to grow grapes, make wine - a nice change in lifestyle."

As he tells it, his interest in Australia and its wine country developed over the years, during business trips to that country.

"Growing up on a farm, I've always absolutely loved going to wine country," he said. "And Barossa Valley is the Napa Valley of Australia."

It was back in 2003 that he and Pam bought a parcel of land in Barossa Valley, comprising about 100 acres, with half of it planted in vines. The fruit was "under contract to someone else," and he had in mind just peeling some grapes off to make wine for family and friends.

But it wasn't long before the decision was made to go commercial. And if you own a vineyard and want to sell wine, then you need a winemaker.

It was veteran winemaker Lindsay Stanley who fit the bill. Among other things, he had trained with famed Australian winemaker Max Schubert, so he had the know-how that Lambert lacked.

"Keep in mind, I knew nothing about the wine business, except that I liked to drink it," the former Wisconsinite said.

The duo shook hands and combined Stanley Brothers winery with Lambert and his vines: "We got along well, and put our names together."

Their wines span the distance from everyday table wines to ultra-premium Cabernet and Shiraz. For my money, a good place to jump in is with the pure, unoaked 2005 Stanley Lambert Pristine Chardonnay or the Mustang Sally Shiraz, both tagged at about \$13 a bottle.

Their 2004 Family Tree Shiraz, Barossa Valley (\$70 a bottle), earned a 90-point rating in the Wine Spectator. They also make a popular chocolate-flavored port, called Choc-a-Bloc (\$27 a bottle).

Many of the wines have catchy names with special meaning for the family. There is, for example, A Thousand Words Chardonnay (\$20 a bottle), named for a daughter "who is a nonstop talker." And there's the Shiraz, Malbec, Merlot blend called Black Sheep (\$16 a bottle), which refers to an

On Wine



Photo/Karen Sherlock

Jim Lambert grew up in Wisconsin but has moved to Australia, where he now owns Stanley Lambert vineyard. He came back for a visit in early May to share a few of his new-release wines at Chuckie's House of Wine in Franklin.

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anonymous relative.

Perhaps the most venerated bottle is the Silent Partner Cabernet Sauvignon (\$70 a bottle), created in honor of Lambert's father-in-law, W.R. Sauey, a noted Wisconsin entrepreneur.

"He helped me start my first company," Lambert said.





















And the silent partner reference "was kind of done in jest," because, according to his son-in-law, Sauey is not known for his lack of words.

One nicety on all the bottles, except the chocolate port, is a little peel-off neck label imprinted with the name of the wine and the winery Web site (www.stanleylambert.com).

It's for folks who enjoy the wine and "want to remember what it was in the morning," Lambert said.

Anne Schamberg is a freelance writer who lives in Waukesha. She also writes Drinks. E-mail her at aschamberg@aol.com.

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