



WINE BY *design*

A VALLEY WINEMAKER IS CREATING MEMORABLE, HANDCRAFTED WINES WITH MINIMAL INTERVENTION AND TRADITIONAL WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES.

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The night before entries closed in the prestigious annual James Halliday Qantas Epicure 2018 Wine Companion Awards, Shaun Crinion of Dappled Wines decided he would enter his complete 2015 portfolio for "the sake of it."

When a call came from James Halliday himself some weeks later, Shaun initially thought he'd just been shortlisted. Halliday, however, had bigger news than that. Wanting to know where Shaun had been hiding all these years, Halliday took the Yarra Valley winemaker by complete surprise when he announced Shaun was being awarded Best New Winery.

Far from being 'new' to the wine industry, Shaun has spent the past fifteen years refining his natural instincts for winemaking from the humble status of 'cellar rat', working with his winemaker uncle in a successful central coast Californian vineyard, to prestigious local makers such as Domaine Chandon and Rob Dolan Wines, and a range of small and medium producers in between.

Building on his degree in Viticulture and Oenology, Shaun has worked in more than twenty different vineyards, including vintages in California and France, and across a variety of Australian regions including Western Australia, New South

Wales, Tasmania and Victoria. It is this exposure to the quality and variety of Australian fruit and winemaking techniques that has seen him emerge his own wine philosophy: Handcrafted wines, made with minimal intervention and traditional winemaking techniques.

In 2009, Shaun started Dappled Wines with a "view to making high quality, unadulterated wines from special patches of dirt at realistic prices." He started out making wines that were first and foremost for family and friends – using small batches of quality fruit provided him with scope for greater creativity and the ability to carefully craft wines that showcased his biochemical and practical knowledge. Stylistically his wines are often compared to the French.

The current 2016 release – which was approximately 800 cases of each variety – is already sold out, but 'getting bigger' at the expense of quality or his philosophy is not the goal. "I want my wines to be intergenerational, for my daughters to inherit a legacy – an honourable wine tradition," says Shaun. "There is a fine line for me when it comes to commerciality. I want to create memorable, soulful wines and I think it's hard to commercialise wines like this". Authenticity is the high ideal in all he does.

A family man – Shaun has two young

daughters with partner Catherine, a marketing consultant – the opportunity to make the wine he loves for half the week, and care for his family the other half has provided a near perfect balance. The family recently established a home on the Mornington Peninsula, the beachside location providing an idyllic lifestyle for this ex-Sunshine Coast surfer. “Actually, surfing is responsible for me even being in the wine industry,” says Shaun. At 19 years of age, it was the need to earn some money while on a surfing trip to California and Mexico that saw him arrive at his uncle’s cellar door looking for work. With a natural palette for quality, the first wine Shaun ever bought was a bottle of \$150 Charles Heidsieck champagne.

As a traditionalist, hands-on winemaker, Shaun’s approach each vintage is to source quality fruit from a variety of vineyards. Growers in Gembrook and Steels Creek Estate (where he also makes and bottles his wine) provide much of his fruit, but his ‘appellation’ style approach to some of his wines means each bottle may contain carefully selected and pressed fruit from a variety of growers in the region. His label ‘Dappled Wines’ reflects this ‘a touch from here, a touch from there’ approach and gives his wines a complexity, texture and completeness that defines his skills as a winemaker.

The hands-on approach is also a hands-off approach. While Shaun provides much of the labour involved in preparing and pressing fruit – he will even stomp with his own feet – his philosophy is more about “standing back and letting the wine do its thing”. With a love for the microbiology of winemaking, Shaun uses nature to make the best wine he can, with wild yeasts and minimal additives. When working alongside other winemakers, his tiny box of ‘additives’ was of some amusement to his peers. “There are just so many ways you can support the fruit to be all it can be as a wine,” says Shaun. “Even things like gravity filling bottles rather than mechanically pumping the wine makes a difference.”

Growing up without a ‘wine culture’ has perhaps ensured a particular humbleness in Shaun that is also present in his wine. Without the shadow of big industry, and big money, Shaun’s wines reflect the same honesty and quiet achievement as he does – sensitive, not pushy, but prepared to stand apart.

“What’s real at the end of the day is not how expensive or coveted the wine is that you are drinking, but that it brings you together. And that you are enjoying the time, space and company you are in. The essence of why you are there is not the wine, but it adds savour to the moment,” says the man who also placed in the Young Guns of Wine Top 50 this year.

“I’m looking forward to the next vintage!” •

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OPPOSITE PAGE Shaun feels at home in the vineyard. THIS PAGE Wine apparatus sits amongst the latest vintage for Dappled Wines.



