

# A wine for all seasons

writer *Fiona Stocker*

photographs courtesy of *Moore's Hill Estate*

Is riesling a summer wine? Its fresh and zesty flavours seem perfect, to me, for offsetting the heat of a summer day. But Fiona Weller and Julian Allport, from Moore's Hill, are having none of it.

"No! Every day!" insists Allport, while Weller advocates bathing in it.

It's their inner wine sales person talking perhaps, but as we sit in the cosy cellar door on

this green, grey and wet winter's day in the West Tamar, the lime and lemongrass notes linger on my palate. As the wine rests in the belly of the glass, a pale, wheat-coloured pool, I can see why neither the seasons, nor anything else, should be a barrier to enjoying this particular drop.

*left to right Julian Allport, Otto the winery dog, Fiona Weller, Stella and Lucinda, Tim and Sheena High.*





*Moore's Hill solar-powered winery and cellar door*

Matching it to foods is the work of a moment's imagination too. Chicken, beef, fish, Julian recites. Pork with an Asian treatment, muses Fiona, the riesling cutting through the richness. But it's also great with oysters, and often served in this combination at Moore's Hill.

And plain old fish and chips, she adds.

A wine with more versatility than many give it credit for, riesling still suffers from the bad reputation it gained in the 1980s when a slew of sweet versions hit the market.

Not all rieslings are sweet.

Fiona Weller and Julian Allport owe much to their riesling, for it gave them a lifeline and a sense of hope when they most needed it. The day after the couple settled on Moore's Hill in 2008, Lehman Brothers investment bank collapsed and the global financial crisis took the world in its grip. For their first five years of ownership, they were unable to invest as planned in the business. They worked the cellar door seven days a week with a small family, and wondered what on earth they had done.

In a bid for encouragement, Allport entered the 2008 riesling into the Royal Hobart Wine Show, driving south at the last minute to

get it onto the judge's table. It promptly took three trophies: Best Riesling, Best Tasmanian White Wine and, most unexpectedly, Best Tasmanian Wine, beating the heavily favoured ranks of pinot noir.

The couple had other reasons to hang in. They could see the rapid development of Tasmanian wine industry – once heavily populated by hobbyists, they could see a next generation of serious and ambitious professionals moving into the Tamar. Furthermore, Allport's background in climatology had convinced him that Tasmanian cool climate viticulture would escape some of the changes the warming planet would inflict upon mainland vineyards.

After completing a graduate certificate in oenology – the science of wine making – and several vintages learning the ropes with great makers such as Fran Austin, then trailblazing at Bay of Fires, Allport “kept talking about Tasmania”, says Weller. When Moore's Hill came onto the market, with its established mix of pinot noir vines and the chardonnay from which the island's much-lauded sparkling is made, it seemed a natural next step.

The couple formed a partnership with Fiona's father, Lance Weller, who brought accountancy and a business head to the table, along with her own corporate marketing background and Julian Allport's expertise in "the science of mucking around with grapes".

The vineyard had a reputation for consistency and an enviable microclimatic spot in the West Tamar, elevated, with good drainage and elegantly situated on a rise above the highway just south of Beaconsfield. Its robustness was testimony to the capabilities of the previous owners whose background in agriculture had created a sturdy groundwork.

With Allport as wine maker, he and Fiona Weller set about lifting the business, talking to tourism operators and building cellar door sales, developing a wine club and mailing list. They rebranded, commissioning the ornate and emblematic logo which today embellishes the front of the timber clad building in steel, and the

wine labels with white space and the occasional fleck of gold.

And Allport began chasing the winemaker's holy grail of a great pinot noir.

Morale took a blow in 2013 when they poured the concrete slab for an on-site winery, only to find the shed company they were contracted to had gone belly up, taking their customers' funds with them.

Like riesling on a cold winter's day, however, it was an unexpected blessing.

Enter Tim and Sheena High, of Native Point Wines on the East Tamar. Allport and Weller had already bought pinot gris grapes from them and knew them to be capable, Tim with a corporate career and Sheena a viticulturist. There were natural synergies and, with Lance Weller ready to retire, a ready opening for new partnership, and a new vitality.

It had been Tim and Sheena High's long-held ambition to build a sustainable winery, and this sat very comfortably with Julian's interest in

*left to right Winemaker Julian Allport at work, seafood platter at cellar door and Moores Hill Riesling*



achieving a closed-loop, environmentally-conscious system. All former plans for “a shed” were quickly superseded by a far more exciting next phase and a first in Tasmanian winemaking – an off-grid, solar powered winery. Due diligence proved a strong business case for the concept, with pay-back within six years making a commercial solar system viable.

With architecture by Joel Fletcher, high-spec timber and steelwork finishes by D2 Spaces, and state-of-the-art solar system by Mode Electrical, the result is a quietly majestic structure which has been submitted for a Master Builders Award.

“They’re all good Tasmanian businesses,” says Allport, the satisfaction evident in his voice.

Inside, Fiona Weller guides me no less elatedly past premium equipment including a state-of-the-art German wine press, perfect for the pinot grape with its need for careful handling.

Opting for the luxury of making purely their own wines and no others under contract, they have set the winery’s maximum capacity at 100 tonnes, housed in oak barrels and handsome, steel-jacketed Italian tanks. The largest, at 10,000 litres, and named Elvis for ease of identifying, is, of course, for riesling. **40**

