



L-R: Annabel, Lucy, Georgia and Robert Hill-Smith



Yalumba

Lisa Johnston looks at what continues to make Australia's oldest family-run wine company such a success.

The Hill Smith family have been making wine at Yalumba since their first vintage in 1854. When Samuel Smith planted the first grapes in 1849, he was already a savvy entrepreneur but it was a stint chasing Bendigo gold that helped fund Yalumba's establishment. While each of the generations have made their mark on the family business, it was not until 1989 that the seeds of today's Yalumba bore fruit. After Robert and his brother Sam Hill Smith secured all non-family Yalumba shares, they forever changed the direction of the business which had been, until then, predominantly domestically focused.

The change in Yalumba's destiny away from the traditional fortified production was something that Robert and Sam's father, Wyndham Hill Smith, foresaw when vineyards for table wines such as Oxford Landing Estate and the Eden Valley vineyards were established. Wyndham was also instrumental in the first forays of the Stelvin screw cap into Australia back in 1976.

In the past 20 years, Yalumba has achieved a growth that can be envied by many of the Australian corporations. A growth, largely due to being family-owned meaning it can ride out the lows with the highs without having to deliver double digit growth to shareholders. Perhaps because of this, Yalumba has built a passionate team behind the brand including ambassadors such as Brian Walsh, Jane Ferrari and talented chief winemaker Louisa Rose.

The Hill Smith brothers not only feel a passion to continue the family business and leave a legacy for future generations but they also have a driving desire to make a difference. They are proud members of Australia's First Families of Wine, a collective of 12 Australian family-owned wine companies. By following their philosophy of sustainability, "All the major things we do must be sustainable in every sense of the word", means that 'fads' will not be part of the company's wine direction.

This philosophy is also plainly evident in the creation of Yalumba's Old Vine Charter & Reserve Charter developed not only as an additional assurance of label integrity, but to nurture the 'jewels' in their vineyards. Some of their oldest vines date back to the 1880's.



Under the Old Vine charter, if a wine is labeled using terms such as 'old vine', it will come from vines at least 35 years old.

Other progressive programs that have been initiated under Robert Hill Smith's leadership are to maintain the only still privately-owned cooperage on a winery in the southern hemisphere and to produce a growing range of wines that are suitable for vegans.

Their commercial vine nursery established in the 1970s, has allowed Yalumba to continue to work with new varieties. Their pioneering work with Viognier in Australia has been ongoing since the first vines were planted in 1981 with the recent sourcing of seven new clones from Condrieu and the USA being planted in their vineyards. Not only does Yalumba produce classic dry viognier and shiraz viognier, they also have several dessert styles and unique blend of viognier with tempranillo and grenache.

Wines from Yalumba are now sold in 38 countries, partly due to the power of its distributor arm Negociants which also gives the team insight into the changing tastes of wine drinkers, not just in Australia but throughout the world. It is this insight that also keeps them in touch with the new generation of wine drinkers, with slick cinema advertising such as 'Talk Eat Live Laugh' and the Yalumba Stories blog, regularly updated by Jane Ferrari, amongst their communications arsenal. These insights, plus the family's passion and vision means Yalumba will continue to be one of Australia's most innovative wine producers and the Hill Smith's one of Australia's leading wine families.

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