

# Highland Vibes at Home in the Hunter

Your Hunter Valley Jan/Feb 2022



**The McLeish story is more of an epic journey than a mere tale. From a very different early career outside of wine, Bob McLeish found himself in the mid-'80s immersed in viticulture and producing a Semillon that has been awarded best in the world.**

This family-run vineyard and cellar door in the Hunter Valley has literally won the prestigious World's Best Semillon Award 3 times, in 2012, 2013 and 2016. Established in 1985 by Robert (Bob) and Maryanne McLeish, the single-vineyard produces quality and varietal purity that has seen it awarded over 300 accolades. With over 60 Trophies, 76 Gold, 60 Silver and 80 Bronze since its inception – it's one of the most awarded boutique wineries in Australia. Over the course of 37 years, the vineyard expanded the range to six varietals, including Semillon, Verdelho and Chardonnay along with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz whilst evolving into an undisputed international leader for Hunter Valley Semillon, a fact that we can all be proud of.

In the days when Bob McLeish played first-grade rugby union and worked as an engineer, he began courting a young woman named Maryanne who came from Newcastle and worked on Macquarie Street in a Sydney solicitor's office. Bob was spending a lot of time in Adelaide for work, and the two enjoyed a long-distance relationship with lots of travelling to and fro. Bob disliked the beer and the water in Adelaide and started drinking the wines. Together, the two developed a passion for wine that began their lifelong journey into a new career and a new way of life. When it was time to settle down, they were attracted to the quiet life of the

Hunter Valley, the proximity to Maryanne's family and the opportunity to try their hand at a new hobby.

They purchased a 16-hectare property on DeBeyers Road, Pokolbin and planted it out, learning as they went along from Noel Martin, a Hunter Valley-based Vineyard Manager. Bob's methodical engineering mind stood them in good stead, and despite spending many years overseas for his engineering work, the family business started to take shape, with a cellar door being established in 1995



Any visitor to McLeish Estate will notice that there is a definite Scottish and Highland vibe to what they do. Bob's father emigrated from Kilmarnock, south of Glasgow, Scotland, when he was a boy, and settled in 'The Shire' in Sydney, raising his three boys within a solid Scottish tradition and culture which Bob has maintained to this day. A gifted piper, who plays and has taught the bagpipes, Bob can often be heard playing amongst the vines to the visiting customer's delight. Scottish traditions form the basis of many of the estate's events, with the annual highlight being the Hunter Highland Lunch. The next Hunter Highland Lunch will be held on 17 September 2022 and will be a celebration of Scottish tradition. Beginning at 11am, guests can get their feet in on the fun with Highland games, caber tossing, sparkling on arrival, as well as a mass pipe band, followed by a delicious three-course feast perfectly paired with McLeish's award-winning wines.

"We'd love everyone to come and enjoy the gourmet long lunch and soak up the essence of the Scottish heritage."

"Covid has kept us quiet for two years now but maintaining these historic homeland traditions is important to us, and we know that so many others look forward to it every year. We're excited to be planning one for 2022 after our 2-year absence."

The Covid pandemic, as with many other hospitality venues and tourism operators, has provided the estate with the opportunity to extend their cellar door experiences through a significant renovation, opening up new spaces and allowing for several new offerings, including the new dedicated wine room where guests can enjoy an array of vintage wines and charcuterie share plates. The interior space takes inspiration from a classic wine oak barrel with exposed brick walls and concrete floors providing a rustic, cellar door experience, while warm timber and cosy furnishings create a convivial atmosphere. Over 30 wines are featured, including the multi-award-winning World's Best Semillon and iconic aged reds. Discerning drinkers will be able to get their hands on limited back vintages as well as good value wines, with the popular McLeish Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc, Victoria Chardonnay and red blends all available. If you'd prefer the outdoors, particularly in the current Covid environment, there is the beautiful seated pergola area where you'll find perfect vineyard views as you sip a refreshing, crisp Semillon.



This latest expansion is the brainchild of Jessica McLeish, daughter to Bob and Maryanne, who has grown up inside the industry and is now owner and operations manager of the estate. As a toddler, she played under the vines, and as she grew older, she was put to work in the vineyard to help out wherever she could. Her first choice of career, however, was in Human Resources Management.

It wasn't until a visit to Bordeaux in France when she went travelling that her eyes were opened to the possibilities of a future in the family business. She worked for two months on a biodynamic, family-run vineyard and credits that experience with her inspiration. On her return to Australia, she completed her Masters of Wine Business at the University of Adelaide and became a judge on the Australian Wine Show and International Wine Challenge judging circuit.

There are at least seven different wine tasting experiences to be enjoyed at the McLeish Estate cellar door, where you are highly likely to meet the family. They consider it a point of pride to welcome guests to their clan and educate those interested in the wines they are enjoying.

In addition to the cellar door experiences and the Hunter Highland Lunch, the team have also paired up with Restaurant Mason in Newcastle to present the Vintage Wine Dinner 2022 on 3 March. Chef Chris Thornton (One Chef's Hat at Restaurant Mason for seven consecutive years plus a Michelin Star at The Ledbury, Notting Hill – London) has curated a seasonally-inspired five-course degustation, which will be perfectly matched with eight McLeish Estate wines.

"Summer sea breezes and cool Semillons are an ideal combination," says Jessica.

"Newcastle's coastline and Semillon are the perfect fit. The ultimate pairing happens when you create a balance of flavours where the wine supports and lifts the dish. When you combine summer, seafood and Semillon, everything shines. Most excitingly, the evening will culminate in celebrating our 37th vintage. There will also be the opportunity to taste rare release wines, including the Reserve Shiraz 2011, which will be poured from magnums – we can't wait to see everyone."

A team of ten at McLeish Estate makes all this magic happen under the direction of Jessica, Maryanne, and Bob. They strive for quality, not quantity and were very innovative during the Covid lockdowns, helping to grow the business, calling all their customers and fully engaging so that the customer experience is as good as it can be. Bob and Maryanne are retiring, and Jessica is forging ahead, growing the experiences with entertainment and education and personalised tastings. She has her sights set on maintaining the consistent quality and authentic Hunter Valley varietals that the estate is known for. The winery maintains its exclusivity and control of the brand by only selling through the cellar door, wine club or selected fine dining restaurants. With her 20-month old daughter Chelsea living the lifestyle her mum did before her by her side, Jessica McLeish is one amazing lady to watch!





#### MCLEISH ESTATE CELLAR DOOR EXPERIENCES

- **VINEYARD RANGE WINE TASTING** – a seated wine tasting ideal for groups – relaxing and informative.
- **WINES OF DISTINCTION TASTING** - a guided tasting through the Hunter Valley's benchmark varietals, this tasting format will also provide vertical tastings.
- **ENJOY THE GROUNDS - BBQ & VINEYARD RANGE TASTING** - enjoy an entertaining and educational Vineyard Range wine tasting with our staff at the Cellar Door, then enjoy full access to the grounds and BBQ facilities.
- **REGIONAL TASTING PLATTER** - locally grown, locally sourced, award-winning produce designed for couples and groups to share - includes a selection of cheddar, brie, salami, gipsy ham, salmon gravlax, avocado salsa, olive tapenade, hummus, zucchini and pine nut frittata, smoked tomatoes, grilled field mushroom, fresh bread and water crackers.
- **MCLEISH ESTATE ICONIC VINTAGE EXPERIENCE** - a fireside wine tasting that will take you through a wine flight of the iconic McLeish Reserve vintage wines accompanied with local cheeses.
- **GRAZING AMONGST THE VINES & TASTING** - a scenic flight over the Hunter Valley Wine Region by helicopter, a glass of Sparkling NV Duke Cuvee and then guests are invited to enjoy a seated Premium Wine Tasting experience, followed by a picnic of local produce on the estate's stunning hill-top vantage point.
- **WINE CLUB MEMBERS TASTING** - complimentary for Wine Club Members only and is held exclusively in the newly opened Member's lounge – includes a complimentary cheeseboard.