

SE Good Taste
HD Prime **property sold**
BY John Lewis
WC 666 words
PD 28 May 2014
SN The Newcastle Herald
SC NEHR
ED First
PG 30
LA English
CY © 2014 Copyright John Fairfax Holdings Limited.

LP

DRINKS

A Hunter vineyard's future is uncertain, writes John Lewis.

TD

IT'S ironic that last week the French-owned liquor giant Pernod Ricard announced the closure of the Branxton Wyndham **Estate** cellar door, restaurant and function centre, while in far-off London, the Wyndham 2009 Black Cluster Hunter Shiraz won a gold medal in one of the world's most prestigious wine competitions.

There was further irony in the fact that Pernod Ricard last week confirmed that agreement had been reached, but no contract yet signed, for the **sale** of its prime Black Cluster vineyard in Mistletoe Lane, Pokolbin.

The 2009 Black Cluster red was one of 11 Hunter wines to last week claim gold medals at the 2014 International Wine Challenge (IWC), the British-based competition that attracts about 10,000 entries from around the world.

Two of the 11 gold-medal Hunter wines, the Leogate **Estate** 2011 The Basin Reserve Shiraz and the McGuigan 2007 Shortlist Hunter Semillon, were awarded trophies.

The **sale** of the Black Cluster vineyard to **Chinese** interests has been rumoured for months but last week, Pernod Ricard Australia global corporate communications manager Sarah Descher told me the name of the proposed **purchaser** and the price to be paid were confidential.

She said the **sale** contract would provide for Wyndham to continue to source grapes from the Black Cluster vines and from the vineyard at the Branxton cellar door **site**. Pernod Ricard would retain the Wyndham **Estate** and Black Cluster trademarks.

The long-term future of the historic Branxton **property** was yet to be determined but for the next two years, Pernod Ricard would maintain the **site**, appointing a resident operations co-ordinator.

The Branxton cellar door would not close until the end of October but the Olive Tree Restaurant, run by chef Andy Wright, would shut next month.

The closure is expected to result in the loss of nine jobs. For the time being, the IWC gold medal 2009 Black Cluster Shiraz will be available at \$90 a bottle at the cellar door.

Along with the Jacob's Creek, Orlando and Gramp's brands, Wyndham **Estate** is a key part of Pernod Ricard's Australian portfolio.

Pernod Ricard ceased winemaking at Branxton 17 years ago and Wyndham **Estate** wine production has been centred on South Australia.

Wyndham **Estate** at Branxton has been a tourism showplace and a regular venue for open-air operas and performances by international stars. In 2011, it was judged the national best tourism winery at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards.

Sparks at Mount Pleasant

McWILLIAM'S senior winemaker Adrian Sparks is moving to the historic Mount Pleasant winery at Pokolbin to work alongside chief winemaker Jim Chatto in the Hunter Valley.

A graduate of Charles Sturt University, Adrian joined McWilliam's in 2002, and has risen to the position of senior winemaker, with responsibilities for the successful Tumbarumba chardonnay projects, the Barwang and Armchair Critic wines, the Tighrope Walker wines from Victoria's Yarra Valley and the Last Horizon wines from Tasmania.

During 2013, Adrian's wines collected some major show awards. These included the NSW Wine Awards, Wine of the Year with the Armchair Critic 2012 Chardonnay, the Brisbane Wine Show best pinot noir of show with the Last Horizon 2012 Pinot Noir and the Melbourne Wine Show best young dry white table wine trophy with the Tighrope Walker 2012 Chardonnay.

Adrian, who worked on the 2014 vintage at Mount Pleasant, is excited about his new role.

"The history and getting to work with fruit from vines planted by arguably Australia's greatest ever winemaker is something to treasure and something you can never become complacent with," he said.

"I want to learn about the history of Mount Pleasant, the vineyards, the winery and the story of Maurice O'Shea."

In addition to his role at Mount Pleasant, Adrian will continue to oversee the McWilliam's **Group's** Tasmanian and New Zealand portfolios.

RE austr : Australia | nswals : New South Wales | apacz : Asia Pacific | ausnz : Australia/Oceania
PUB Fairfax Media Management Pty Limited
AN Document NEHR000020140528ea5s0001r