

Sons make wines to make a dad proud

IT IS NOW over 30 years since Neil and Lorraine Ashmead returned to Australia from the Middle East — where Neil had enjoyed success as a salesman of heavy earth-moving equipment — looking for somewhere to live.

In 1979 they purchased the Elderton property in the Barossa Valley along with a vineyard planted by regional pioneer Samuel Elderton Tolley in 1894 that was blessed with extremely old shiraz and cabernet sauvignon vines that were lying derelict.

The couple restored the 30 hectare vineyard and in 1982, a time when interest in Australian table wines was limited, the Ashmeads launched their first wines under the Elderton label.

Elderton won the Jimmy Watson Trophy — Australia's most famous wine award — at the Royal Melbourne Wine Show in 1993 and has since become a global success story while remaining family owned.

Neil Ashmead, a larger-than-life character who loved wine and fast cars equally, died in 1997 but his eldest son, Cameron, and younger son Allister run the business today with their flagship Elderton Command Shiraz still made from fruit from the 116-year-old shiraz block by winemaker Richard Langford, one of the quiet achievers of the Barossa.

Cameron Ashmead made a flying visit to Tasmania a couple of weeks ago for meetings with distributors Domaine Wine Shippers and to show off some of the family's latest releases — including the complex, rich, seamless and



Winsor Dobbin
Off The Vine

potentially long-lived 2007 Command Shiraz, which spends three years in oak — now largely French rather than American — and retails for around \$100.

"It was a difficult year with only 20 per cent of the normal volume produced, but what we did make was quality," he said.

Elderton is known for making wines that are full-flavoured without being over-extracted. Balance is a key word both when it comes to fruit and to oak handling.

"We still make classic Barossa styles but are usually able to keep our alcohol levels under 14.5 per cent, which is something we are very proud of," says Cameron.

That is no mean feat, with many Barossa reds edging towards 16 per cent in warm vintages.

"The Barossa is always a region that will have higher alcohol levels, but we are also looking for finesse and refinement when possible."

Elderton has four different labels, ranging from \$20 wines labelled Eden Valley and Adelaide Hills onwards and upwards. For me the greatest value is offered by the range of estate reds, currently the 2008 shiraz (see below), merlot and zinfandel in Tasmania, and

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Cameron and Allister Ashmead.

the 2007 cabernet sauvignon. All retail for under \$30.

Over the next three years Elderton plans further expansion with a new cellar door and an on-site restaurant. New vineyards are also on the agenda.

"I think Dad would be very proud of what we've achieved over the past 14 years," his son says. "I think the quality of what we are doing would please him."

An early taste

DETAILS of Savour Tasmania, the mid-year food and wine festival, have been released with events scheduled in Hobart, Launceston and Burnie from May 25-June 4.

Now in its third year, Savour has become a fixture on the culinary calendar and a number of leading international and Australian chefs will match their offerings with Tasmanian produce and wines at a series of dinners and master classes.

Among the visiting chefs will be a team of Danes led by Martin Bentzen, formerly of internationally-acclaimed Noma, award-winning Margot Janse from Relais & Chateaux property Le Quartier Francais Hotel in Franschoek, South Africa, New Yorker Marco Canora and Martin Boetz from Longrain in Sydney and Melbourne.

The wine program has yet to be unveiled but will include the Red Wine Weekend at The Long Gallery, Salamanca Place, Hobart on May 28-29. Tickets go on sale April 4. Visit the website www.savourtasmania.com for further details.