



MEDIA RELEASE: MAY 2012

On reflection, Yabtree’s natural advantage comes via the Murrumbidgee and the extra sunlight it delivers

□ Yabtree 2008 Shiraz (\$28)

Simon Robertson, viticulturist for Jim Wolfensohn’s small Yabtree vineyard near Gundagai, admits that the idea of extra sunlight producing lower-alcohol wines might initially seem quite bizarre.

“But you have to consider how that sunlight is delivered,” he said.

“Normally in Australia, extra sunlight comes from straight overhead and is accompanied by greater heat, which raises the sugar level in the fruit and ultimately increases the wine’s alcohol.

“What we have at Yabtree is rare, perhaps unique, in Australia. The combination of the broad Murrumbidgee and the slope of the adjacent vineyard creates a scenario where light is reflected from the water, increasing the rate of photosynthesis, without increasing heat, and producing optimum fruit ripeness in our shiraz at 13–13.5° Baumé rather than at 15° Baumé.”

Simon points to the German experience with reflected light in areas such as the Rhine and Mosel Valleys, where riesling grapes can be harvested fully ripe at a couple of degrees less Baumé than in Australia.

“Winemakers have sometimes wondered about how the Germans have been able to produce full flavoured, yet relatively low-alcohol rieslings,” he said.

“I believe that it’s at least partially the result of reflected sunlight.”

At 13.5 per cent alcohol, Yabtree 2008 Shiraz isn’t exactly a weakling, but it does carry a good 10 to 15 per cent less alcohol than the country’s many 15-per-cent-plus reds.

“What our winemaker Joel Pizzini has been able to produce here is a more European-style red, one that still has ample flavour but shows a more savoury rather than sweet edge,” said Simon.

“And that means a more food-friendly wine.”

Simon Robertson admits that he is still on a steep learning curve with the Yabtree vineyard and making the most of its rare terroir.

“I’m looking at various canopy-management techniques to take greater advantage of the reflected sunlight and I’m confident we can get alcohol levels down a bit more without sacrificing flavour,” he said.

“And then there’s also the option of selective harvesting, simply because not all the vines are in a position capture the same amount of reflected sunlight.”

Simon sees a distinct similarity between the Yabtree 2008 Shiraz and the initial 2007 vintage.

“It shows strong varietal berry and spice, but there’s also a dry earthiness that gives it that savoury edge, and there’s also well integrated French oak adding complexity,” he said.

“It’s a great match for most red meats, but I particularly like it with lamb. And I reckon it will cellar well, too, at least in the medium term of five-to-eight years.

For further technical information, please phone Simon Robertson on +61 (408) 684 577. For distribution details, please contact Paul Stenmark of Winestock on +61 (2) 9331 3671 or at nsw.office@winestock.com.au.

NOTE: High-resolution images can be downloaded from WineMedia’s website (www.winemedia.com.au).

Release issued by WineMedia, contact John Rozentals (phone 02 9743 5734 or email jrozentals@winemedia.com.au). It would be appreciated if copies of articles and reviews based on this release could be emailed to the above address or posted to WineMedia, PO Box 3484, Rhodes 2138.

ABOUT JIM WOLFENSOHN AND YABTREE

Australian-born-and-raised Jim Wolfensohn represented his country in fencing at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. His financial and economic acumen eventually led him to the United States and he became President of the World Bank from 1995–2005.

He lives in New York but has also built an Australian home on his historic Yabtree West grazing property near Gundagai.

In terms of vineyard development, Jim's initial idea was to plant just a tiny block so he could produce a few hundred bottles of decent red to share with his family and friends. For help he looked to Simon Robertson, whose family pioneered the Hilltops grape-growing region by establishing the Barwang vineyard, and who is recognised as one of the most experienced viticulturists in the Gundagai and Tumbarumba regions.

Simon quickly realised the potential of the site and convinced Jim to raise his ambitions and plant four hectares of shiraz.