

The Advertiser



 Torbreck general manager Peter Perrin at Torbreck wines in the Barossa. Picture: MATT LOXTON

SA Business

Torbreck opens new cellar door to the world as it builds on the success of its big red wines

Belinda Willis, The Advertiser
May 16, 2017 12:00am

TORBRECK wines saw the last of its Mataro hand-picked grapes come off the vines a week ago and general manager Peter Perrin has high hopes for their future.

Perrin says it's been a late but fine harvest on the back of two other strong vintages for the high end winery that creates some of the nation's most highly sought after and expensive drops of wine.

These days, the Barossa winery stands alongside the likes of Penfolds and Henschke's Hill of Grace in making the nation's priciest bottles with its top line The Laird 2012 shiraz commanding an asking price of \$750.

"We have people who will come to this cellar door and we will sell them six figures of wine, we have private tastings with clients ... we are one of the top high end estates in the world," Perrin says.

“There’s Penfolds, Hill of Grace and then there’s Torbreck, three wineries with the most expensive wine made in Australia and most sought after by collectors and they are all made in South Australia.”

It was 10 years ago that American tech billionaire Pete Kight bought the picturesque winery renowned for its big reds, its largest shareholder was Sydney businessman Jack Cowin of Hungry Jacks fame.

The label had built a solid international reputation with founder Dave Powell at the helm, and Kight was committed to seeing its star rise.

Perrin was recruited and, together with Torbreck’s long-time wine maker Craig Isbel, Kight set about building on Torbreck’s reputation.

Last month, a new cellar door opened at Marananga to help cement the business plan.

With the help of a \$200,000 State Government grant and Barossa architect Jamie Gladigau, a contemporary glass, stone and wood public tasting area with an extensive deck overlooking the Descendant vineyard was unveiled.

Inside, an existing settlers hut now houses an exclusive tasting room with an accompanying commercial kitchen.

Perrin says Torbreck is planning to bring local chefs in to create intimate dinners and tastings — kicking off with Press Food and Wine creating a degustation menu during the recent Barossa vintage wine festival where its 2012 The Laird was launched.

It was a sell out with Perrin saying a double magnum of Torbreck’s The Laird Shiraz 2012 release also later sold during the festival — at the biennial Barossa Wine Chapters Auction — for \$7,689.

The tasting room with its exquisite Tasmanian wooden dining table capable of seating 36 has a tantalising neighbouring room where clients can wander through and see a bottle representing every vintage Torbreck has made in the past 20 years.

It’s all about adding to the experience for Torbreck’s dedicated wine supporters and is part of a business model Perrin says will help keep Torbreck at the top of the winemaking tree.

There’s been other changes, Craig Isbel is gradually stepping back to consultant as he continues to develop his own personal labels while new recruit Ian Hongell, formerly chief winemaker at Peter Lehmann, takes over the helm.

Perrin is also keen to keep growing the label’s Barossa holdings, three vineyards were purchased recently and he is constantly on the lookout for new opportunities.

But he insists production levels will remain controlled and continue to target the more discerning wine lover.

“We are predominantly premium, I compare Torbreck with a high end car, more like a Porsche or a Ferrari,” he says.

“The owner wants us to continue to be the custodians and owners of the old vineyards here and to continue to make the very best wines.”

At the moment, about half of Torbreck's wines, including a handful of whites, is sold in Australia to local buyers including top restaurants like Chianti in Adelaide along with the Quay and Rockpool restaurants in Sydney.

The rest go overseas with the United States a key market and "China becoming more and more important to us".

Perrin believes the secret to success is in continuing to forge a unique path and challenging the norm.

"We're an unusual winery, we're based in the Barossa, making some of the most expensive wines, we're named after a Scottish forest with varietals traditionally grown in the Rhone valley," Perrin says.

"If someone wrote that in a business plan most would say, now that's not going to work."