

# RUSSH

• THE COLLECTIVE /

## *NATURE'S WAY*

WORDS ANNA HARRISON



Few things in life compare to a glass (or three) of great red wine with a slow cooked something on a cold winters night. Or a shiny crisp rose on a lazy Sunday afternoon by the sea in summer. We're a culture of wine lovers – the humble fermented grape is steeped in our history and threaded through our DNA. But something has been happening to our beloved joy juice over the last few decades. In shooting for higher yields at lower costs for greater profit, many winemakers have been turning to artificial and potentially dangerous means of addressing that old bottom line. This may mean plumper pockets for the wine seller, but for us as consumers all it really means is mornings full of Panadol, greasy food, slow-moving synapses and regret. Thankfully conscious winemakers who are passionate about restoring integrity to their craft and eradicating epic hangovers are cropping up in all corners of the globe.

In New South Wales' Hunter Valley, Harkham Wines are at the forefront of the natural wine movement in Australia. Not only do their wines contain no nasties, their grapes grow up listening to classical music and receiving blessings on a daily basis. RUSSH chats to co-founder Richie Harkham about his naked wines and doing it like the Romans did.

### ***What's unique about Harkam natural wines compared with standard commercially produced wines?***

Harkham Wines is one of the most unique wineries in the world – not only is it the only fully committed Kosher winery in Australasia but it is also one of the very few in Australia that focus primarily on completely preservative-free wines. We make the only natural wine in Hunter Valley with minimal intervention in winemaking process – some of our wines are

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A lot of wines made in Australia are starting to taste the same. The use of science and technology mean that winemakers can use a formulaic method and utilise almost any quality of fruit, strip it back, and built it back up to a homogeneous tasting wine. Our fruit, on the other hand, is carefully handpicked and sorted to eliminate rot, unripe fruit and any other diseases, so we can make a style of wine which can be traced back to a specific region in a specific year.

When this level of care is taken from the grower to the producer you can quite literally taste the difference.

***What is your winemaking philosophy?***

When we make wine we want to best portray the natural flavours from the unique and amazing terroir of the Hunter Valley. Every time you add something in the winemaking process you add an artificial flavour that masks on of the original flavours unique to the land, hence we make some of our wines from 100 per cent fermented grape Juice to retain the unadulterated taste of nature. We also do not filter our wine as you lose a layer of taste. We believe that rather than “making” the wine we help the grapes be the best that they can be. We take something that is perfect (grapes) and try to help keep that perfection.

Part of our philosophy is we also believe we take from the earth and we should give back. Last year we built a dining hall in Kenya which I went over myself to build. This year we have teamed up with another charity and are building a school in Myramar.

***In a commercially driven industry where it's become easy to cut corners, how do you maintain the integrity of your product?***

High quality natural wine is the hardest wine in the world to make well. Every step along the way you need to be perfect and there is no room for error. The grapes all need to be handpicked and have no diseases as you cannot add anything. The winery needs to be completely clean and sterile because even a little bit of microbial infection will make the wine go bad and your winemaking needs to be spot on. If there's an error, there is no recourse. Hence why we call natural wine 'naked' wine as it is like a naked body, you can see all the blemishes. Also we only allow good energies in the winery. Numerous Rabbis bless our wine and we play classical music and use temp control to influence the fermentation. We also go back to ancient times and focus on using taste and feel rather than science, and are vigilant in observing what's happening at all times.

***What's the benefit of buying and consuming natural wines?***

The addition of sulfur to the wine binds the flavors and the aromas, and tightens the palate, however sulfur free wines display natural viscosity and aromas and every bottle brings a natural element of energy and surprise, which I personally love. You know what you are drinking – it gives you a snapshot of everything that happened in that vineyard in that year that you can take anywhere in the world but will always take you back to where it comes from. Also, No hangovers!

***What do you love most about what you do?***

Working with mother nature is very challenging but rewarding. I love that due to constantly changing weather no two vintages will ever be the same. I love that we are entrusted with the task of taking grapes and helping them transform into wine, which I believe is God's gift to the world. I love that the wine is alive and always changing.

***What's the difference between 'natural' and 'organic'?***

The key thing to mention here is that there is no official definition/classification of wine as "natural". The term has been used more and more over the last five or six years to describe a certain wine making philosophy that has been adopted by winemakers from all over the world. There are a lot of arguments within the natural wine “movement” as to what classifies wine as natural. Some believe that you cannot add anything or take away anything from the wine, whilst others believe that you can add a small amount of sulphur at bottling (around 30 ppm) and may use a yeast culture when fermenting the wine. But all agree that it is wine made with minimal intervention in the winemaking process.

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Conventional wine making relies heavily on manipulation and additives, natural wine opposes this approach by manipulating the fruit as little as possible. The terms “organic” refers to a set of farming principles that apply to the vineyard including no use of herbicides, pesticides and fungicides. Grape growers can apply organic principles and either be certified or uncertified. The idea behind organic grapes (or anything organic) is to ensure the highest quality of fruit.

***Tell me a bit about your latest project?***

This year I’m exploring orange winemaking made like the ancient Romans would have done, using Semillon grapes on skins in clay amphorae. I had an artist make to the same dimensions of ancient ones. I’m making this wine with no electricity as a green and anti modernisation of the wine industry project. Orange wine is an extreme point of view of natural winemaking – it’s when white wine has some time with skin contact. Traditionally when you make white wine you press the grapes straight away to separate the skins which you would get rid of and ferment the Juice only. However when making orange wine you leave the skins for an extended period of time, which will then give the wine an orange colour. The skins will also give the wine more of a textural taste with wild fruit flavours like pears, apples, citrus peel and many others.

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