



# HALF MOON - Giant Killer

By Scott Watkins-Sully

When Braidwood's very own Half Moon 2010 Riesling took out a few gongs at the Canberra Wine show on September 13th, there was a packed function room full of somewhat surprised guests; none more so than Half Moon Estate manager Mal Sharp.

The day before the show, Mal took a call from one of the organisers who wanted to confirm that he'd be attending. The ever dedicated Mal and wife Jenny were expecting frost, so he suggested that he might otherwise be engaged. The gentleman on the other end of the line emphasised that it would be "good if you could attend!" Mal got a slight inkling that Half Moon might end up with a bronze medal pinned to its viticultural chest, so when the weather forecast for the evening changed radically, Mal and Jenny were Canberra bound.

The medal prediction turned out to be right, but not spot on. It was the 2010 Shiraz that took out a bronze, but the masterpiece 2010 Riesling remained undecorated. Perplexed, but not disappointed, the Sharps sat back to enjoy being part of the elite winemaking community's night of the year. Feeling like industry rookies having managed Half Moon for a just handful of vintages, if was with gobsmacking astonishment that they heard it announced that their much cherished baby had taken out the trophy for "Best Riesling!" In the company of Riesling making legends such as Ken Helm and Tim Kirk from Clonakilla, Half Moon's 4 acres had borne a true masterpiece! When it went on to take out "Best Dry White" the

room was abuzz with chatter, most likely along the lines of "who are these upstarts?" When the Half Moon 2010 Riesling was awarded "Best Wine of Show," it was apparent that there was a giant killer in the room!

Half Moon was planted on a shaly slope flanked by an untouched nature reserve back in 2000. The irrepressible team of Mal and Jenny Sharp were approached by their neighbours Tony and Robyn Maxwell about putting a small area under vines. Mal who will turn his very capable hand to anything that requires dexterity, read a few books, took some expert advice and set about placing trellises and planting vines. Within a year the vines were well onto the cordon wire. When Tony decided that they should plant more vines in 2001, Mal suggested that they'd better get on with it as at the age of 56, he was concerned that he'd be too old to enjoy the wines by the time the corks were ready to pop! By 2005 Half Moon enjoyed its first modest vintage still in time for Mal to enjoy a glass, prior to incarceration in a alcohol free, maximum security twilight home.

With the expert guidance of consultant David Botting the vineyard was expanded to 5500 vines which by 2006 included Shiraz, Pinot Gris, Chardonnay and of course Riesling. Some of the world's finest wines come from climatically marginal regions; Burgundy being such an example. Half Moon is certainly situated in a very marginal zone and the loss of nearly the entire 2007 vintage to frost during the Summer, brought the realities of marginal viticulture home,

the hard way. Following the installation of frost alarms and spray heads to protect the vines in 2009, the Half Moon team of David, Tony, Mal and Jenny had got the viticulture right. When much celebrated winemaker Alex McKay joined the team for the 2010 vintage, Half Moon was well and truly set to bask vinous glory.

Following the major accolades at the 2012 Canberra Wine Show, the remaining stock of the 2010 Riesling has been held for "museum release" at an undisclosed date some years down the track. The previous recommended retail price of \$18 will reflect what a bargain the wine formerly was when compared to its price when sold as a much prized, very limited release, bottle aged wine. The good news for bargain hunters is that the 2011 Riesling reflects the Half Moon terroir, expert viticulture and wine-making prowess that made the 2010 vintage such a huge success. Big, superior fruit combined with crisp lingering acids, indicate that the 2011 might be picking up a few gongs of its own. Whilst local retail support for Half Moon products has been somewhat challenged for unfathomable reasons, Sue Maas at Wines on Wallace has got right behind our local label and stocks the entire range along with a number of other excellent wines from this region.

Half Moon's success is something that all of us in Braidwood should be proud of. We should support local produce and when we have access to something so local and of such incredible quality, the choice isn't difficult.