



# sparklingcompany

**With a bright new cellar door facility and wines to match, the powers that be at Jansz Tasmania have every reason to be bubbly**

TEXT BY CAMPBELL MATTINSON

WHEN YOU STAND ATOP THE STEEP SLOPES of Jansz vineyard in the Pipers River region of northern Tasmania, it's easy to be swept away by the view. Turn one way and Bass Strait spreads out before you, the tiny Ninth Island bobbing in the blue; turn the other way and you're faced by a snow-sprinkled mountain range.

In this cool-climate landscape, where the average maximum temperature in January (the area's warmest month) is just 21C, Jansz Tasmania produces top-quality sparkling wine. As Jansz winemaker Natalie Fryar explains, "What Bass Strait does - apart from give great surf - is create a perfect heat seat. It's a magical site."

Graham Wiltshire AOM started it all back in 1975, which is why he's affectionately and respectfully regarded as one of the principal founders of the modern Tasmanian wine industry. Back then, the name for the site was Heemskerck, a name that still exists as a Cellarmasters brand but which today has no association with the original vineyard. This vineyard is now owned and run by Yalumba, fourth in a slightly confusing line of owners of the site that include French Champagne house Louis Roederer, Tasmanian businessman Josef Chromy, and, for a short time, Tasmanian wine industry leader Pipers Brook. The muddling part is that when Pipers Brook sold the (now named) Jansz vineyard to Yalumba, it retained half, meaning that Heemskerck is an integral part of the history of both Pipers Brook and Jansz (both still share roads and access to the vineyard).

The story of how one of South Australia's best loved wine families, the Hill Smiths of Yalumba, came to own a sparkling wine vineyard in Tasmania is an interesting one in itself. Robert Hill Smith, in particular, had been keen on Tasmania for a time. In the 1980s, he saw a report by Moët & Chandon on the suitability of Australia for making sparkling wine. This concluded, from a detailed nationwide survey, that from a perspective of sheer quality, the Pipers River region of Tasmania held the greatest potential.

"The report was unashamed in its support for the region," says Hill Smith. "From then on, I tracked the progress of Pipers River - and if we'd had the money, we would have invested in it earlier."

The Jansz brand itself had been devised by Graham Wiltshire when he was in partnership with Louis Roederer. Yalumba, when it took over in 1998, changed the name to Jansz Tasmania, to make it crystal clear from where the wine came. This was a move that would, no doubt, have pleased Wiltshire, who had been "made redundant" of his own dream by the powers at Roederer. "We had great differences of opinion," he concedes. "They wanted to make a replica of French sparkling wines from here, while I wanted to make Australian wine and, more specifically, Tasmanian wine."

It's a point Hill Smith is also keen to make. "Internationally, the market for premium Australian sparkling wine is very, very small - though one day we think this will turn. We want to make something sensational but with a truly Australian thumbprint on it. We're happy to bleed the French dry of information on how to go about it, but its 'Australianness' is an essential ingredient."

Today, the outlook for Hill Smith's ambitions appears rosy, especially with the February opening of the Jansz Wine Room & Interpretive Centre in the original Heemskerck Winery building. Although it's been designed to look weathered and in tune with its local environment, the interior is slick and contemporary - perfectly reflecting the image of a company on the up.

Contributing to this is Fryar, a Roseworthy graduate who shares Hill Smith's passion for creating sparkling wine with a Tasmanian flavour. "Expressing the place in which the grapes are grown is the primary focus for all of us here," she says. "We're making Tasmanian sparkling wine from this particular vineyard, so both in the winery and in the vineyard we're trying everything we can to express the soil here, the site, the individuality of it. This place is all about elegance, about almond and honeysuckle flavours in the chardonnay (grapes)."

For evidence of that, look no further than the current 1996 Late Disgorged Cuvée release, with its big swings of meal and cedar, burnt butter and almond composure. Others to look out for include the (also current) 1999 Vintage Cuvée, riddled with Turkish delight scents, and the 2000 Vintage Cuvée (to be released later this year), with its superb pour of full-on flavour.

As for the future, Robert Hill Smith puts it thus: "We've made great headway, and there's already a great lineage, but we are on a course that's aimed entirely towards making great wines."

*Jansz Wine Room & Interpretive Centre, Tasmania, Pipers Brook, open 10am-5pm daily, phone (03) 6382 7066.*