

A heavenly hideaway



The past is honoured in this precious piece of McLaren Vale history.



In 1840, a chap by the name of Samson Tall boarded the brig Caroline in Plymouth and arrived in Port Adelaide five months later. He immediately settled in McLaren Vale and by 1853, owned three farms in the region.

Later that year, he cut a little two-acre square off his Strout Road farm and donated it to the community to build a church. The former place of worship is now a sweet little cellar door and small family-run winery. Samson Tall is buried out the back in the humble little Bethany Cemetery, framed by a lovely garden and vineyards.

A friendly black labrador called Miller greets visitors with a wag of the tail. Her devoted owners love to tell the story behind their little patch of land. It is a tale of love in all its forms.

Winemaker Paul Wilson and Heather Budich met in 2007 while working at Wirra Wirra Winery, where Heather was events and cellar door manager and Paul worked in the cellar. Every now and then, they'd pass the little old church. "Heather's parents lived up the road and we'd drive up there once a fortnight to have a glass of wine with them," Paul says.

From the moment they laid eyes on it, they knew they had to own it. It wasn't quite that easy though – they wrote to the owners every year for eight years, pleading to purchase the special piece of history. "They sold us the church on the ninth year," Paul says.

Back then, it was a bed and breakfast, and the couple ran it as accommodation for two years before taking the plunge and turning their little wine label dream into reality.



"I grew up in Adelaide and was a corporate runaway before I went back to uni to study winemaking," Paul says.

Their cellar door opened on 27 December 2018. The couple stayed true to its historic features, including the original floors and walls. A glass pane offers a glimpse of the original cob (clay, straw and fine rubble mixed with water), which the walls were built with.

Next door, in a shed next to the church, Paul's winery has all the mod cons required to make his small but stunning range of Samson Tall wines. He's quite the talented chap.

The range of five wines are sold to the public through cellar door and via the Samson Tall website, and can be found at some Fleurieu Peninsula restaurants. The Tempranillo, Grenache, Shiraz, Grenache Rosé, and Cinsault Mataro Rosé were all made using McLaren Vale fruit. Each label features evocative images of the church or vineyards the fruit was plucked from.

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Dedicating the brand name to Samson Tall was a no-brainer – it's a fitting nod to the man who started it all more than 130 years ago, and a typical gesture from a tiny operation full of genuine heart and soul. Paul and Heather are on hand to pour the wine for visitors, and the walls are covered with local art (including a few gems by their two young children). Heather's beautiful pottery is available for sale, too. There's even an old piano for anyone with musical skills to share.

"We rely solely on people coming here," Paul says. "We're not selling thousands of cases through distributors and we're not going to get rich in a hurry, but we're not going broke either."

Service doesn't get much better. "It's just Heather and I, the kids and the dog. The dog is more famous than any of the wines."

Make sure you take time to pay your respects to Samson Tall while you're there. The words 'His end was peace' appear on his gravestone and this is a lovely tribute to what may have been the first settler in the Bethany district. Raise a glass to the other residents buried here, too. Their headstones may be humble, but the impact they had on the region was impressive. ●


Samson Tall
McLAREN VALE

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