

Gipsie no joke!

Michael Sinclair

John Glaetzer has spent more than 60 hours in aeroplanes this year, and probably that number of hours again sitting in airport lounges around the world, so it would be no surprise if John feels like a New World gypsy.

John has been on the road selling his latest label, Gipsie Jack, which sits under his John's Blend label. His partners in the project are Bill and Ben Potts from Langhorne Creek.

For John and the Gipsie Jack team there is an element of the Masterson gamble that Peter Lehmann took with his growers in the Barossa in the late 1970s.

Sick of seeing Langhorne Creek growers having their contracts made null and void, John wants to see loyalty reintroduced into the winegrowing vernacular, with growers getting paid an amount that makes their livelihood sustainable.

"In the past two years a lot of the growers I have been dealing with since the 1960s have been getting screwed by the big boys and they haven't had their contracts renewed, which gives me the shits," John said.

"The big boys will pay \$550 a tonne, but stipulate that yields are kept below four tonnes to the acre when the cost of growing grapes is \$3,000 an acre.

"It doesn't compute. We're paying a rate where the growers cover their costs and make a quid, so it makes it a viable proposition for everyone.

"In three or four years' time I can see the tables being reversed when the big boys are looking for grapes and these growers can tell them to go and shove it."

Working as a consultant for Wolf Blass Wines doesn't seem to alter John's position. As usual, he calls it as he sees it.

"The other thing we want to do is give Langhorne Creek the recognition it deserves by putting the region on the label. The majority of Langhorne Creek fruit has gone to the big companies and isn't recognised, but that's changing now with labels such as Heartland, Bleasdale, Bremerton and Zonte's Footstep," he said.

The most novel factor in the Gipsie Jack



label is John's involvement in making a Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. Here is one of the country's most awarded red winemakers, with a penchant for wood, jumping the pond to make an unoaked white.

With the Sauvignon Blanc it isn't simply a case of tasting some tank samples and picking the right wine at the right price. John and Bill Potts walk up and down the rows of their contracted grower's vineyard near Blenheim, NZ, tasting the grapes and picking them at three separate stages to gain complexity.

"None of that cat's pee stuff though," John said. "We're looking for tropical flavours."

It might seem un-Australian to choose New Zealand over an Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc, but Bill has his own Marlborough plot that they will be able to source fruit from for future vintages, when contracts are up for renewal, and the demand for Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc is a given.

ACNielsen says that total NZ Sauvignon Blanc off-premise sales in Australia, for the year ending July 2005, were \$55.9 million, up 87.5% on the previous year, while sales for the year ending July 2006 were \$80.8 million, up 44.5%.

John completed a world trip in May introducing Gipsie Jack to foreign shores, taking orders in London, Switzerland,

Singapore, China and Canada, with the next move being in the US when Gipsie Jack has enough stock.

Domestically, Gipsie Jack has distribution on the eastern seaboard including Canberra. They handle their own distribution in South Australia and are looking to Western Australia in the near future. Even the Northern Territory is covered.

"People buying the wine love to meet the winemaker and it doesn't matter if they're buying one bottle or 10 dozen, you treat them all the same," John said.

Gipsie Jack's NSW wholesaler ordered a third of the volume produced for the '05 vintage.

For John Glaetzer and Ben Potts, the other benefit of selling Gipsie Jack is getting two sales out of one visit, with 'John's Blend' and 'Ben Potts' making up the orders as well. Ben enjoys a similar symbiotic relationship with his own premium label (Ben Potts) and the sub \$20 Gipsie Jack.

Gipsie Jack's first release (2004 vintage) was a "suck it and see" approach, with only 250 dozen cases made. Numbers for the '05 were ramped up to 2,000 dozen Shiraz and 2,500 Sauvignon Blanc, and production doubled this year with the US and Canada in mind.

John says a small amount of rosé was also made "for the girls".

He has approached his new label with a Wolf Blass mentality.

"We wanted to make the wine drinkable and approachable with soft tannins. It's meant to be a fun, bistro style wine that goes with food at a good price," John said.

Something John is adamant about is spending money on marketing.

"We use our WET rebate (\$290,000 on the first \$1 million sold) as our marketing budget, while I think a lot of people are factoring that return into their wholesale price," John said.

"The other thing we do is use that money for actual marketing instead of subsidising any discounting. There are a hell of a lot of \$15 to \$20 wines being discounted to \$12.99, which is being paid for out of the marketing budget."