

TEXT SOPHIE OTTON

Moorilla Milestone

To celebrate 50 years of winemaking, Moorilla Estate owner David Walsh enlisted winemaker Conor van der Reest to create an upper-tier range of new and unique wines.



RISING UP
The Moorilla Estate winery.
Below: Conor van der Reest.



MOORILLA ESTATE, north of Hobart on the Derwent estuary, is celebrating 50 years of winemaking with a series of events that both honour the past and look to the future. Founder Claudio Alcorso was an Italian textile merchant recreating some of his old country in Australia. He could not have imagined when he first planted vines in 1958, despite advice to the contrary, that Moorilla Estate would evolve into what it is today.

To mark the occasion, Moorilla winemaker Conor van der Reest has created a trio of new and original wines, which will be released as the Cloth Label series this month. “The range is simply comprised of a white, a red and a sparkling, with around 160 dozen of each,” he says. “They’re all drawn from our St Matthias Vineyard in the Tamar Valley.”

Claudio Alcorso’s early Moorilla Estate wine labels were originally made from off-cuts of cloth from his factory. Applied by hand, they became symbolic of his success as both a textile manufacturer and a vigneron. In tribute to this, the new Cloth Label series will be dressed with labels like the originals.

Today, there is so much more to Moorilla Estate than wine. Its connection to one of the world’s more outrageous artistic ventures, the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), is inextricable. As a boy growing up in the working class suburb of Glenorchy, David Walsh used to pass by Moorilla and gaze in fascination. As he came into his fortune, collecting artworks along the way, he was presented with an opportunity to buy the estate, and in effect became the owner of a

museum and a winery at a single stroke. That was in 1995.

“I lived opposite Moorilla on the eastern banks of the Derwent and I had a fondness for decent local pinot, of which Moorilla was a fine purveyor,” says Walsh. “I put in what I thought was a stupidly low tender, but the bank disagreed, and I became a vigneron.”

Walsh wasn't just interested in acquiring a winery. Claudio Alcorso had built a house for his family, the design of which was based around an old Roman villa. As such, its interiors were far less prone to the vagaries of the outside temperature. Walsh knew this was a much more stable environment to store the artworks he was steadily accumulating.

In 1999, the house became the Museum of Antiquities. From there, Walsh pondered the possibilities, and in 2005 began a major redevelopment of the site, which included the construction of MONA deep down into

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the sandstone, and a new winery for Moorilla along with sundry other constructions.

Canadian-born Conor van der Reest had come on board as winemaker in 2007, and oversaw the rebuilding of the winery. Van der Reest has extensive international experience, doing 15 vintages in 10 years during one stretch. Soft-spoken and reserved, he has focused his attentions on the quality of the fruit in the vineyard, moving towards organic and biodynamic practices. Despite the increased capacity of the new winery, production has been cut by 80 per cent so he can concentrate expressly on quality.

With things humming along nicely, Walsh suggested van der Reest create something special to complement Moorilla's Muse and Praxis ranges. Van der Reest was reluctant. “David wanted a reserve wine, but I wasn't so sure,” he explains. “So I was trying to find something that would fit in that upper echelon but also work within the limitations that I had with the vineyard; a special wine that was not your typical reserve style. I wanted to give David something unique, that was specific to us as well.”



Van der Reest pondered the assignment. He'd studied his masters degree in Montpellier, and a great deal of his research was split between Champagne and Châteauneuf-du-Pape. He reflected on their tendency to blend grape varieties of different colours, and that became his inspiration.

The **2012 Moorilla Estate Cloth Label White** (A\$110) is a blend of pinot gris, riesling, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and gewürztraminer with seven per cent pinot noir. Each variety ripens in sequence, but curiously the pinot noir is picked first. It's pressed first, lightly, so the red pigments don't colour the must. By contrast the white grapes are crushed and fermented on skins. The barrel fermenting pinot is then used to seed the first white that ripens, which is in turn used to seed the second and so on.

Each of the six varieties produce a barrel of wine, which is precisely blended into one 1500-litre cask. Van der Reest's intention is to reveal subtle glimpses of varietal character and flavour that give the wine an intriguing texture and complexity, without any single variety dominating.

For the **2012 Moorilla Estate Cloth Label Red** (A\$110), the idea was to produce a wine that was slightly bigger than a pinot noir but not too full-bodied. It's a blend of pinot noir, shiraz, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc with a splash of riesling. The wine is made similarly to the white except here the riesling is added last. “It's the binder between the velvety tannins of the pinot and the astringent cabernet tannins. It is the conduit between the red varieties,” he explains.

Van der Reest's intention is to present a fragrant and supple wine with fresh acidity and elongated tannins that allow the fruit to glide across the palate.

To complete the range, van der Reest has disgorged a small batch of sparkling that had been maturing for close to a decade. **2004 Moorilla Estate Cloth Label Late Disgorged Sparkling** (A\$145) is tightened and refreshed with a touch of young white. He's very happy with its balance, generosity of fruit, succulent acidity and overall restraint.

The release of these three wines is a fitting tribute to celebrate 50 years of winemaking at Moorilla Estate, and a mark of respect for Claudio Alcorso and his legacy. The Moorilla Estate Cloth Label series will be officially launched in June 2014.