



IRISH INDEPENDENT WEEKEND

April 2006

By Myles McWeeney

Bill Martin from Athlone in Co Westmeath, is managing director of the award-winning Margaret River Australian winery, Clairault.

In 1974 Bill upped sticks and moved with his wife Ena and three small boys, the eldest just four and the youngest barely 12 months old, to Perth in Western Australia. There was no economic reason for the move.

"I felt I wanted a challenge, to see the world, and if I didn't do it at that age I'd never do it again," he explains.

"Almost by accident, when we got there I became involved in a wine and spirits importing company that was eventually bought out by the giant Seagram's company."

That was Bill's introduction to the world of wine, which he found fascinating, but it was almost 30 years later, after the Martins ran their own successful food-processing company in Australia and America, that they went into wine full time.

In July 1999 the opportunity arose to purchase the historic Clairault vineyards, the sixth oldest in the celebrated Margaret River area which produces some of Australia's finest wines.

"Clairault was only established back in 1967," Bill says, *"and in real terms Margaret River, which has a similar terrior and climate to that of Bordeaux, is still very much a baby as a wine region. I think our wine style is more elegant and refined, more European, perhaps, than that of other Australian regions."*

What started out as a small family business has grown exponentially. *"We had 30 acres to begin with, but we've increased that to 120. We have tripled our crushing capacity, and we've added a 200-seater restaurant."*

It's very much a family business too. Bill and Ena's youngest son, Brian, manages the vineyard while another son, Conor, looks after the promotional and PR side of the business.



PICK OF THE BUNCH

Clairault Estate Semillon Sauvignon Blanc

This is a clean and clear unoaked wine which has an excellent citrus blossom aroma with a touch of grass and spice. There's plenty of forward lemon peel and apple flavours in here and a touch of honey, above a refreshingly crisp minerality. The stock is en route to Ireland and will be available soon.

Clairault Swagman's Cabernet Merlot 2004

Easy-drinking red with an appealing character, full of plump, ripe berry fruit flavours with just a touch of tannin on the finish to give the wine good balance – and it lasts longer on the palate than you'd expect.

Clairault Claddagh Reserve 1999

This is the flagship wine in the Clairault range, and reflects the character of Margaret River Cabernets – rich blackberry and violet aromas, and full rich berry fruit flavours. Made from 50p Cabernet Sauvignon, 25p each of Merlot and Cabernet Franc with a dash of Petit Verdot and matured for 24 months in a mix of new and old oak barriques, this is a stunning, serious wine with 10 years cellaring potential.