

# RISING STARS

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The Adelaide Hills is proving a fertile playground for charismatic wine-producing duo Matt Gant and John Retsas from First Drop Wines.

Talented winemaker Matt and marketing whiz John make wine in the Barossa and McLaren Vale but produce all their Italian varietals in the Hills.

The trio of wines includes Minchia Montepulciano, The Big Blind Nebbiolo Barbera and Bella Coppia Arneis.

"You look at the diversity of this region in terms of viticultural sites, the possibilities, the potential, I think it's the most exciting wine region in SA and in Australia as a whole," Matt says.

Matt and John met when both were working at St Hallett winery in the Barossa.

"We'd been talking about alternative varieties for a few years and we'd come to the realisation St Hallett was a traditional producer and it has a heritage so we probably couldn't make Adelaide Hills Arneis or Montepulciano or Nebbiolo Barbera whilst working there," Matt says.

"It's a bit of a throwaway line when winemakers say 'we make food wines', all wine is food wine, but we genuinely did want them to have balance and restraint and character.

"A lot of these alternative varieties offer different palate and tannin structures and flavours which you can't achieve when you're making Shiraz and, even though we're both still passionate about Shiraz, we want to do more than that."

First Drop wines are garnering accolades here and overseas including *Wine Spectator* (US) editor Harvey Steiman's description of Matt Gant as a "rising star" and the company as "a winery to be reckoned with".

The pair agrees that, despite global financial difficulties, it's an exciting time to be involved in the wine industry.

"There's such diversity out there and there's a generational change going on, a lot of exciting young winemakers, viticulturalists and marketers coming through and we're getting back to stories too, about people driven from different backgrounds to make great wine," Matt says.

"And it's also never been more challenging - you've got to excel at viticulture, winemaking, packaging, the way you go to market - everything - and then these things just get you to the starting line and it's just bloody hard work after that."

First Drop wines have a reputation for eclectic packaging with their early labels designed by Lure Creative in Stirling and others by Mash Design.

"Labels are a very important part of communicating who we are and also the fact each wine is different. Coming from a corporate, traditional wine marketing background the brand was central and everything looked homogenised, and that wasn't what we wanted," John says.

Matt: "Ultimately it still comes down to the booze in the bottle - you can grab people's attention, get them to pick it up and read the back label and say 'that's cool, we'll buy that' but what's in the bottle will end up deciding if they go buy it again."

[www.firstdropwines.com](http://www.firstdropwines.com)



Matt Gant and John Retsas are making First Drop wines