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**Matt Gant**  
 2004 Wine Society  
 Young Winemaker of the Year

# Salute to young gun

An excursion led to an award-winning career for one young winemaker, reports JEFF COLLERSON

**O**n the eve of an army career, Matt Gant went on a field trip to a wine region. It turned out to be a life changing event which has culminated in Gant becoming the Wine Society's Young Winemaker of 2004.

British-born Gant, 30, assistant to Stuart Blackwell at St Hallett in the Barossa, beat nine finalists after two of his wines were voted tops by the Wine Society's judging panel.

In 1995 Gant was studying geography at university in London as a prelude to an army career.

"My lecturer Dr Tim Unwin had a fascinating book called the *Historical Geography of Viticulture* and as a practical side to the course he took a group of students on a field trip to France," Gant says.

"We went to the Burgundy and Champagne regions and through his connec-

tions he was able to get us into some amazing tastings.

"In hindsight, the whole thing was probably a bit of an excuse for a piss-up but it changed my life.

"Wine caught my imagination so much that Dr Unwin suggested I head to Australia to work during vintage.

"I was soon organised to go to McLaren Vale in South Australia. But on the eve of my departure I broke my arm in a snow-boarding accident.

"It seemed the whole wine thing was going to fall over until, merely as someone interested in wine and with my arm in plaster, I attended a NZ Wine Guild dinner in London.

"As fate would have it I was seated next to Brent Marris, a highly-regarded NZ winemaker. During the dinner I managed to talk my way into a job with him at Delegat's Winery.

"I arrived there in 1996 and then things took off. Next I went to Geyser Park Winery, in California's Sonoma Valley, where I worked with Australians Darrell Groom and Mick Schroter. It was an amazing learning experience.

"Then I did stints at McGuigan's in the Hunter Valley, with Joseph Phelps

in the Napa Valley, and at Tatchilla in McLaren Vale and Bremerton in SA's Langhorne Creek.

"Between 1999 and 2000 I completed a graduate diploma in winemaking in Adelaide. While studying I secured a weekend part-time job as a relief winemaker at St Hallett's in the Barossa Valley.

"When my course was over I went to Spain for more experience but while there I was contacted by St Hallett's offering me a full-time job.

"I started there in 2001 and couldn't be happier because the Barossa Valley is the world's pre-eminent shiraz region.

"What sets it apart from other famous shiraz areas, like France's Rhone Valley, are the varied soils and meso-climates it offers. The Barossa has a great diversity of vineyards and thus, a wide range of wine styles."

But Gant does have a secret. "The Barossa isn't renowned for cabernet sauvignon like it is for shiraz but I'm a bit of a cabernet nut so I keep that a bit quiet," he says.

"At home in Williamstown though I do occasionally drink cabernet sauvignon from California's Napa Valley."

## my style

**Apart from Barossa shiraz and Napa Valley cabernet, what are your favourite wines?**

Sauvignon blanc from New Zealand and Barolo from Italy.

**What's the best wine and food match you have enjoyed?**

Foie gras and a intensely sweet Hungarian wine called Tokaji. Sublime combination.

**What is your favourite dish here?**

Salt and pepper squid.

**The best wine to drink with it?**

A good Eden Valley riesling.

**What should we be eating with Barossa shiraz?**

It's the classic Aussie barbecue partner so steak or spicy sausages like bratwurst.

**Where do you eat in the Barossa?**

Bob McLean's new-ish place Bar Vinum.

**Tip us off on the best eateries in Adelaide?**

My favourites are Bridgewater Mill in the Adelaide Hills and Star Of Greece in Port Willunga. Maybe I'm a bit biased about the latter as I met my girlfriend Emily there while she was working as a waitress.

**Is Emily your biggest fan?**



No, my parents Annette and John, who now live in Leicestershire, were always passionate about wine so are very proud of me.

**Do you have a regular restaurant in Sydney?**

I usually head for Bathers' Pavilion, Balmoral.

**Any hobbies apart from wine?**

I still get a buzz out of travelling. I'm a keen foodie, I was always keen on rugby and I love film.

**Then what's your favourite movie?**

*Sommersault*, a recently-released Australian film. It's awesome.

**In France few consumers know the names of winemakers yet in Australia they achieve cult, if not movie-star status. Does that bother you?**

It doesn't worry me either way, but I would like to see cellarhands get more credit for a winery's successes. Having come from the trenches myself I know they are the unsung heroes of winemaking. Good cellarhands make us winemakers' jobs easy and we can't make good wine without a happy, motivated crew.