

PIRRAMIMMA *Katunga* REDS

By Paul Foster

Tannat, the grape variety, is respected in southwestern France for its dark-fruit flavours and cheek-puckering tannins. Not much is grown in Australia but at the Pirramimma vineyards on the McLaren Vale flat there's a 1 hectare block not far from the winery that was planted in 2001. And it's the Tannat in their 2006 **GTS** red that makes that wine what it is. Rustic and dusty and meaty. A creature that gets about growling.

Pirramimma's **GTS**, a Grenache (55%) Tannat (25%) and Shiraz (20%) blend, is a recent release under their new *single vineyard* range of premium wines. A range that carries the name, *Katunga*. Importantly, the Tannat and Grenache components were held only in seasoned oak, old American hogsheads for the Tannat and well-worked barriques for the Grenache, and as well minimal wood flavours, there's little wood tannin, too.

The thing about skin tannin is that as berries get riper in sugars and flavours, the tannins ripen too. Think of a partially ripe grape, and a fully ripe one. As you bite the first its astringent skin makes you wince. But as you bite the second the grip from its skin is not unattractive. In fact, that firmness and dryness helps balance the sweetness. So this is the role for skin tannins in warm-climate reds like the **GTS**. And unlike the challenge posed by tannins in the likes of cool-climate Cabernet, say an aristocrat from Bordeaux where drinking the wine can be close to a test, they can even possess a softness.

Pirramimma is an important McLaren Vale winery and produces some 50,000 cases of wine a year. You can hardly call it high-profile and it might be a surprise to read its first vines were planted in 1892. That was by Alexander Campbell Johnston and the vineyards and winery remain a family affair with grandson, Geoff Johnston, chief winemaker. Geoff can lay claim to some seriously old Shiraz and Grenache and a range of more recent planted varieties.

The title *Katunga* comes from the name Alex gave the original property, his version of the local tribe's word for what's now McLaren Vale.

Two other terrific Pirramimma reds:

Pirramimma *Katunga* Shiraz 2008

Just 10% new oak, and a true statement of region. Coffee/chocolate/red plum fruit in a deep, long and savoury palate. A 5% Viognier component (importantly, co-fermented) adds special spice. A price to have winemakers weep: \$14 from The Wine Society.

Pirramimma *Old Bush Vine Grenache* 2004

A classic. From gnarled bush-grown vines planted in 1944. Red plum, raspberry, cherry fruit flavours with darker brooding stuff plus white pepper spice. Again, not dependant on new oak. Alcoholic. For the likes of rabbit stew. Value at \$16.