

GALLAGHER WINES

Greg Gallagher has a long history in the Australian wine industry. After graduating from Roseworthy College with an oenology degree, he worked for a short period at Seppelt, then in 1978 he joined Frenchman Dominique Portet at Taltarni in the Victorian Pyrenees region. He spent 20 years with Taltarni, honing his winemaking skills and developing a lifelong love of big, rich reds and complex sparkling wines.



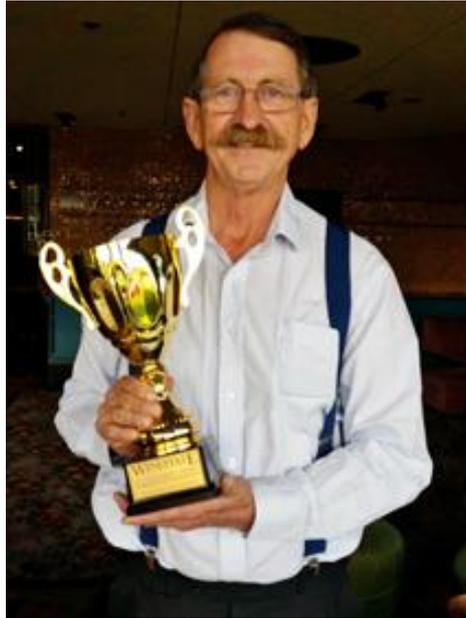
In 1993, with his wife Libby, he set out on a two-year search to find a suitable patch of ground to grow and make the big reds that he loved so much. Interestingly, he settled on the Murrumbateman area of the Canberra district – known more as a cool climate region, but able to produce the fragrant, multi-layered style he was looking for. The first plantings, in 1995, were of chardonnay and shiraz, and the first harvest took place in 1999. Around this time, Greg began a five-year stint as lecturer and winemaker at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga.

In the years since, Gallagher Wines has grown significantly in both production and reputation, and now makes around 2,000 cases in total of sparkling wines, riesling, sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, merlot and shiraz. Greg's wife Libby is an accomplished cheesemaker, and an additional treat when visiting Gallagher's cellar door is the opportunity to pair the wines with Libby's range of excellent cheeses.

Recently I attended a tasting of Gallagher wines hosted by Canberra wine merchant Bill Mason, with Greg on hand to tell the story behind each wine. The event was organised partly to celebrate the 2009 Gallagher Blanc de Blanc winning Winestate Magazine's Sparkling Wine Of The Year for 2015. Congratulations Greg!

Here is what I thought of the wines on offer.

NV Gallagher Sparkling Duet Pinot Noir Chardonnay A blend of 55% pinot noir and 45% chardonnay, mostly from the 2013 vintage, with small portions from 2012 and 2011. Made by the Méthode Traditionnelle (as are all Gallagher sparklers), this is a full-flavoured wine, abounding in flavours of honey and yeast. The palate is fairly simple, but fresh and clean. It shows apple and some citrus elements, with a rich, flavoursome finish. Drink now. (\$30.00) Cork-sealed ★★★☆



Greg with the Winestate trophy

2009 Gallagher Blanc de Blanc The Winestate Magazine trophy winner is a beauty, aged for five years on lees to develop texture and complexity. Pale yellow/green in colour, with a fine, persistent mousse. The nose is extremely fresh and inviting, with crisp apple and lemon notes overlaid with distinct bready autolysis. The palate is just as impressive, with a delicate, toasty complexity and a clean, crisp finish. It's a first-class aperitif, and great value, but sadly is no longer available. If you have some, keep a bottle or two in your cellar for another few years if you have faith the Zork polyethylene closure. ★★★★★

2010 Gallagher Blanc de Blanc Despite being younger, this wine is more developed than the 2009 reviewed above. The colour is deeper, and the nose shows distinct advancement. Flavours of ripe melon, honey and oatmeal are there, but the palate needs a little more vibrancy. Drink now. Zork closure. (\$35.00) ★★★☆

2015 Gallagher Riesling 2015 was an excellent year for Canberra District riesling, and this wine is another which proves the point. It is limey, fresh and zippy, with a touch of regional lemon sherbet on the nose. The palate is flavoursome and juicy, and the acid is already well integrated. It could perhaps do with a bit more fruit intensity, but will drink well over the next couple of years. (\$25.00) ★★★★★

2013 Gallagher Shiraz Here is a classic Canberra district shiraz from one of the best vintages in the area for many years. Deep garnet red in colour, with dark cherry, plum and violets on the nose, and hints of sweet spice. The palate is plush, with dark fruits, cinnamon and star anise tempting the drinker. Velvety tannins support the intense fruit and lead to a long, satisfying finish. Drink over the next five to eight years. (\$30.00) ★★★★★☆

2013 Gallagher Sparkling Shiraz Beautiful colour of deep, inky purple, complemented by a rich, tantalising mousse. The nose is full of blackberry and plum notes, with a freshening lift. The palate is accordingly rich and vibrant, with those dark fruits carry to a clean, satisfying finish. A mouthful of flavour, and an excellent example of this uniquely Australian wine style. Drink plenty of it with the Christmas turkey, but leave some bottles in the cellar for five years to see it develop further complexity. Zork seal. (\$35.00) ★★★★★

Greg Gallagher is showing what an excellent all-round winemaker he is via the range presented above, and all the wines displayed a touch of class. He may have come to the Canberra district to make big, bold reds, but it is clear he also has a penchant for making sparkling wines - and his winery is the only one in the Canberra district with proper sparkling winemaking facilities. With Greg's long experience, innate enthusiasm, coupled with his skill and attention to detail, the future for Gallagher Wines looks bright indeed.

Lex Howard

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Editor's note: Gallagher is pronounced with a silent second g.

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