

Meet the makers of Majama Wines



LISA
ROCKMAN

Rojer Rathod and Millie Shorter made the first batch of Majama Wines in their New Lambton backyard earlier this year.

They picked the grapes in January and bottled the wine in June, and now that wine is on the award-winning wine list curated by sommelier Pat Hester at the hatted Yellow Billy Restaurant in Pokolbin.

For the next vintage, Rojer and Millie have their sights set on Oakvale in the Hunter Valley.

Millie is from the small town of Burren Junction in the north-west of NSW where her parents run a sheep farm. She moved to Newcastle in 2007 to study at university. Rojer was born and raised in Gujarat, India.

"Rojer had been working as a hospitality manager for years and had a good knowledge of wine from that perspective," she says. "He visited the Hunter Valley in 2016 and talked to a few winemakers which sparked his interest in the making of wine, and started working for Meagan and James Becker about two years ago."

Adds Rojer: "I am full-time assistant wine maker at M&J Becker Wines and I am enrolled to study Diploma of Viticulture next year."

Majama Wines was born from a shared ambition to make a small batch of their own wine.

"We were offered some grapes at the beginning of this year and decided to go for it," Millie says.

"We made it our creative project and have done everything ourselves. We love to showcase the true expression of the fruit in the bottle of that year by not adding any yeast, bacteria, protein, fining or filtering.

"All our wines are fermented by native or wild yeast. Rojer has learned a lot about this style of making wine by working with James Becker and Peta Kotz (Sabi Wabi), who have both shared a lot of knowledge and guidance along the way."

Majama Wines is guided by two princi-



Millie Shorter and Rojer Rathod, of Majama Wines. Pictures by Simone De Peak

ples: minimal intervention and a desire to master the making of Sicilian varieties such as Nero D'avola, Inzolia and Zibibbo.

"We chose these because they're quite rare varieties with a rich history that haven't had a lot of exposure in the Australian market yet," Millie explains.

"We're really excited to be making wines from big clay pots called amphora, which is an ancient wine-making technique. Rojer grew up drinking water out of clay pots called matka in India and so making wines from clay pots takes him back to his roots. We are getting our amphora made by a master potter in India."

There are two Majama wines to choose from: the Laal Syrah Nouveau Hunter Valley

2023 and the Jambli Pinot Noir Tumbarumba 2023. Jambli means "purple" in Gujarati and laal means "red". Majama is Gujarati for "happy", "enjoyment" or "fun".

Millie is in charge of design and branding at Majama Wines.

"I love design and was inspired by some of the wine producers in Adelaide who have screenprinted their bottles. I decided I wanted to give that a go and got a little manual bottle-printing machine off eBay," she says.

"It had no instructions so it was a bit of a nightmare getting it to work but we got there and we love the result. We wanted something simple and fun that reflected our approach to wine making."

Rojer and Millie would love to own their



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own vineyard and cellar door one day, and "do a vintage in Sicily", but their short-term goal is more practical: "Making great wines and establishing our brand, attending as many wine events and festivals as we can and getting our name out there".

And as for making it onto the Yellow Billy Restaurant wine list, which was this week awarded three glasses at the 2023 Australia's Wine List of the Year awards (alongside The Newcastle Club and Jana at QT Newcastle)?

"We both work there on the weekends and the owners Pat and Sam have become good friends of ours," Millie says. "They have seen us go through the process of making our first batch and really liked what we made. We're really grateful for their support."

"They have an excellent wine list so we feel pretty special being on it."

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