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COLLECTIVE

ISSUE 14

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IN THE
DIGITAL AGE

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remembering
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TALKS FALLING,
FAILING &
MOVING ON





CHEEKY RASCAL

With the CIDER connoisseurs of AUSTRALIA growing tenfold, a NEW BREW is bringing a sophisticated and thoughtful palate to the pub.

WORDS NATASHA GUTERRES

Saucy, audacious and bold; a ruffian, hooligan or rabble-rouser – this is the innocuous miscreant Matt and Ruth Gallace had in mind when imagining their boutique range of cider, Cheeky Rascal.

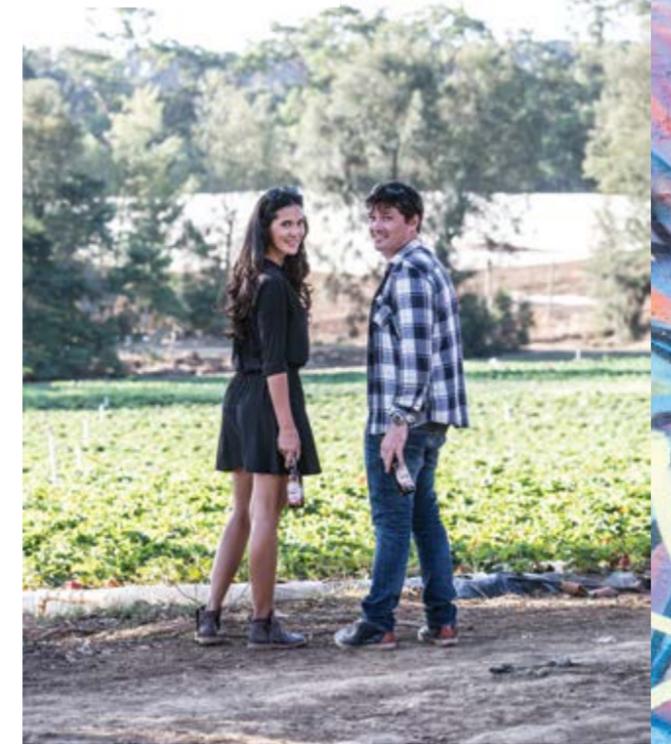
An offshoot of Rebello Wines, the couple’s first and multi-award winning foray into the alcohol industry, the name Cheeky Rascal is perhaps an allusion to the family’s own somewhat cheeky history. Mick Gallace, Matt’s father and notorious strawberry farmer, ripped up his own dad’s prized cherry trees in lieu of planting paddocks full of the illustrious red berry when he himself was in his twenties.

“The story goes that when Matt’s nonno – his grandfather – came home from Italy, he just walked up to the fence of the paddock, had a look around, shook his head and went inside for dinner, and that’s how Sunny Ridge Strawberry Farm came about,” laughs Ruth, who works as the CEO of Rebello, while Matt oversees the production and distribution. “Now we’re the largest privately owned strawberry producer in the country.”

With that familiar backbone of independence, Matt and Ruth broke ties with Sunny Ridge farm in 2007 to pursue their own passions (“We have always maintained that we make products that we like to drink and share ourselves”). Although they took with



OWNERS, MATT AND RUTH



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“It fits with what we were already making – wines from fruit – and it’s just taking that expertise, that knowledge that we have from years and years of making fruit wines, and basically blending it into apple cider or pear cider,” says Ruth, adding that their latest concoction, the méthode traditionnelle (a champagne-cider hybrid) was awarded a gold medal at the Royal Melbourne Fine Food Awards in May this year. “The be-all and end-all of ag[riculture] awards,” she laughs.

Ruth and Matt have fortuitously released their new line of ciders just in time for the changing tastes of the Australian alcohol palate. Beer, a staple of the alcohol industry, is decreasing in popularity every year as more drinkers turn to wine, spirits and now cider. >

them the impetus for their name – and a few strawberries, to boot.

“Rebello is an Italian play on the word rebel; I guess it just leans on that history. To be a successful entrepreneur you sort of need a little bit of that ‘think outside the square’ attitude, that rebel attitude,” says Ruth. “We were always encouraged to find a part of the business that we were passionate about, we were always encouraged to create our own destiny. Saying that we purchased the business is probably even speaking it up a bit. We purchased some equipment and the opportunity to learn our craft and learn how to make what we make.”

Tucked away in the Mornington Peninsular, Victoria – home to some of Australia’s best regional produce (seafood, seasonal fruits, meats and cheese) – Cheeky Rascal’s cider, just like Rebello’s range of fruit wines, is conveniently made up of the fresh ingredients found in neighbouring homesteads. It’s also Australia’s very first 100 per cent real fruit blended cider, which proved so popular it sold out before they had even bottled their first haul back in 2011.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PRUE MCMILLAN



ABOVE: Mick from Sunny Ridge Strawberry Farm (right) and Matt from Rebello (left) collecting berries from the family farm to make the cider. >



No longer just a drink for ye olde English folk, Australians are embracing the sweeter alternative, with sales growing by 30 per cent alone in 2011.

Their unique, hands-on method to brewing also allows room for limitless experimentation when it comes to possible flavour combinations.

“Our philosophy is minimal intervention. It starts with selecting the right fruit. There are probably more [cider flavours] now than there has ever been! My last count with

the Cheeky Rascal family, we’re working with over 21 different fruit combinations,” says Ruth.

“We did a honey apple for Cheeky Rascal last year. We were fermenting the honey and apple together out in the tank and we had just hundreds and hundreds of bees buzzing around the winery. Our winemaker had to borrow the beekeeper’s outfit! My father-in-law was delighted because it was

really good for the strawberry crop in the adjoining field,” says Ruth with a (cheeky) grin.

“There are always things like that. We hand-chopped mint because we didn’t want to crush it, so we could get that vibrant, herbaceous note

[Matt and I] had a RULE that we put in place very early on when we started BUSINESS together, which is that we are allowed to talk about work at HOME, but we are only allowed to talk about the GOOD THINGS

rather than that bruised mint flavour. Our winemaker and our cellar hand chopped, I think, over 20kg or so of mint when we did our Apple Mint cider, the winery smelt amazing!”

As a second-generation strawberry farmer and third-generation produce farmer, Matt has used the knowledge handed down from his Italian heritage to transform his father’s penchant for

distilling fruit liquors – a hobby business he operated on the side, selling into local cafés – into a national operation, spanning both fruit wines and ciders.

With so much emphasis on family in their family business, thanks to generations past and future (Matt and

Ruth have two small children), there’s an art to keeping it all together, reveals Ruth.

“[Matt and I] had a rule that we put in place very early on when we started business

together, which is that we are allowed to talk about work at home, but we are only allowed to talk about the good things and I think it’s served us well,” she says.

And from dinner table conversations to managing their growing team of cheeky rascals, Ruth and Matt are serious about the success of their business. But, says Ruth, there’s always time for a little humour in the midst of all the chaos. ■