

# Swinney's labour of love a game-changer for the west



Farvie Syrah 2018, Frankland River, WA, \$150

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- By NICK RYAN
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Validation is faith's greatest reward, and right now Matt Swinney is up to his eyeballs in it.

Swinney always believed in the potential of the vineyards that form part of the farming property called Franklands that his family has owned in Western Australia's Frankland River region for the past 100 years.

In the 22 years since vines were planted on the property, their tendrils have wrapped themselves progressively tighter around Swinney's heart and mind. For a while it was a long-distance relationship, as Swinney conducted a jetsetting career in international finance, brokering deals to build uranium mines in Hungary and wind farms in Brazil from a home base in London.

He would get back to Frankland River at every opportunity, and every time he'd leave it got a little bit harder to go.

In the past couple of years he has flipped those arrangements completely, basing himself back in Perth and spending as much time as possible down south at Franklands.

Working closely with his calmly capable sister, Janelle, Swinney built the vineyard side of the family business to the point where it was one of the leading growers in the west and a valuable source of premium fruit for some of the biggest players in Australian wine.

They also developed an eponymous wine brand that was well received by the trade.

So, all was going pretty well for Matt Swinney. Things were definitely good, but he knew they could be even better.

In addition to his homecoming and greater focus on the property, two other factors came into play that took a good vineyard and wine brand to the next level.

The first of these was the arrival of viticulturist Lee Haselgrove in 2014. Together with the Swinneys, Haselgrove set about making the changes that elevate good vineyards to great ones, working tirelessly to get a deeper and more detailed understanding of individual blocks, rows and vines.

The other was the return of Rob Mann to Western Australia, the place where his surname is woven through wine history.

The grandson of legendary Houghton winemaker Jack Mann, Rob was back home after many years overseeing the Newton winery in Napa for luxury goods giant LVMH.

Mann's first vintage with Swinney delivered immediate results. Not only did the range of Swinney wines in 2018 seem tighter and more focused but, finally, all the elements were in place to produce a pair of wines that would take this project to a completely different level.

The two wines released under the Farvie label represent the most impressive debut we're likely to see all year.

Named in honour of Matt and Janelle's great-great grandfather and original custodian of Franklands, George John Alexander Swinney (otherwise known as Farvie), these wines are the product of a lot of hard work, a bit of bloody-mindedness, and a fortunate set of circumstances that conspired to bring the very best out of a special bit of dirt.

For Matt Swinney, the game has well and truly changed.

### **Farvie Grenache 2018, Frankland River, WA, \$150**

Grenache is a rare beast in Western Australia; grenache grown on untrellised bush vines even more so. But the masochism required to follow such a labour-intensive and low-yielding practice is something Swinney clearly has in spades.

This wine is one that actually adheres to the notion that great wine is made in the vineyard, with each vine picked and sorted in situ, and only the very best bunch or two from each vine, those sitting in the optimal spots in the vine's architecture, being set aside for Farvie.

That ruthlessness pays off big time. This wine has emphatically inserted itself into the conversation around the best grenache wines on the planet. It delivers the bright berry and exotic spice characters often associated with the variety — think wild raspberries, dark cherries, star anise and mace — but within a tight, coiled and tensile structure that stamps this as grenache of the utmost seriousness.

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This might just be the best shiraz I've seen out of Western Australia. It is a finely etched, tightly wound and mineral-laced wine that redefines the variety in the west.

It substitutes the variety's usual flesh and opulence for a more finely hewn shape, switching out heft for suppleness and sinewy grace without ever sacrificing power and drive.

Black fruits, roasted spices, dark plums and a palpable sense of the ironstone that sits beneath the vineyard, this, like the grenache, is a masterclass in tension; a wine that requires you to come to it, rather than one that explodes from the bottle intent on seduction through sweet fruit.