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# **McLaren Vale, Wine and Vineyards**

McLaren Vale, the home of the Curtis Family Vineyards, is just 45 minutes' drive south of South Australia's capital of Adelaide, has been making wine for one and a half centuries. That's not as long as wine has been made in Italy, but the results are just as encouraging. And how a family with its ancestry dating back to the 15th Century has brought its expertise to McLaren vale with a new range of wines with an impressive European lineage.

The Curtis Family Vineyards is established just west of the township of McLaren Vale in . Its vineyards have flourished and now its sought-after dry white and dry red table wines are available on the Australian and export markets. The story of the Curtis Family Vineyards is really the story of how everything old came new again...of how European immigrants came to Australia, struggled against the odds and then applied old world values and experience to produce fine wines.

The new faces behind the Curtis Family Vineyards are Mark, Thomas & Jenna Curtis, with the guidance of their father, Claudio Curtis who lives on the vineyard just outside McLaren Vale. The name Curtis is thought to derive from Curtius, a noble and wealthy family of the First and Second Centuries AD, the Roman Empire era originating from the Latinium people.

Records show that the Curtis Family name first appeared in Cervaro in 1471, a town established by the Latinium tribe in Central Italy around the Second Century AD. Cervaro is situated approximately 10kms south of the monastery town of Monte Cassino, the site of some of the bitterest fighting between the Allied and German forces in Italy during World war II. Winemaking - Red grapes are harvested at optimum flavour levels, after testing and monitoring of the maturity development, in the cool of the day and then destemmer crushed into fermentation tanks.

Controlled temperature fermentation of 20-25 degree celsius on the skins until almost dry, the cap wet and submerged by regular pumping over, drained and pressed, racked off, followed by maturation in selected medium toast new American and French Oak "hogsheads" barrels. Ideally stored until bottling once the fruit and oak flavour balance is attained. Some bottle age maturity is then gained before the release of the wines for sale. White grapes are harvested in the cool of the night, destemmer roller crushed, must chilled to 6 degrees celsius into an air bag press, free run and gentle pressing separated to cold juice settling tanks. The clarified juice is then temperature controlled fermented until dry. Maturation in selected new medium toast French oak "hogsheads", if required for wooded full body style, or alternatively in inert receptacles prior to bottling. The original Curtis Family Vineyard was re-established in 1973 by The Curtis Family, planted mainly to red varieties, Grenache and Shiraz. Further land was acquired in the 1980's and 1990's eventually expanding the vineyard area. The vineyard area is now planted to both red and white grape varieties upon soil types varying from McLaren Vale type terra rossa to sandy loams over limestone marl subsoils. The varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Grenache, Merlot, Shiraz, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon. All vineyard sites are deep ripped prior to planting but minimally cultivated with inter row cover crops to preserve our precious resource. The vines are drip irrigated through out the warm long summer/autumn growing season to attain maximum fruit quality development. Native fauna is not considered a threat to the ripening fruit and hence no extermination or barring techniques are employed. In fact, the small percentage lost to pecking birds is insignificant, meaning neither gas guns nor shooters are deployed in any of the vineyards. Claudio Curtis has trained a dedicated, willing operations team. All staff participate in a Vineyard Quality Assurance accreditation scheme and attend training to keep abreast of new vineyard techniques. The vineyards are admired by local and international visitors, and are immaculately and fastidiously tended in the Italian tradition....they are bordered by trees to enhance the Australian Wine Industry's international image as a "Green and Clean" industry. Enormous Eucalyptus border the eastern boundaries of the vineyards, abundant with native flora. The History of The Curtis Family Vineyard The first owner of what is now Curtis Family Vineyard was Mr Phillip Hollins, purchased in 1849 from the SA Land Company having been surveyed in 1839 by Mr John McLaren. Mr Hollins had large land holdings in Noarlunga through to McLaren Vale and was also owner of the famous Horseshoe Inn on the banks of the Onkaparinga River in Noarlunga, a necessity for horse drawn carriages travelling south from Adelaide. Mr Hollins died in 1876 and willed his land to Alexander Birrell, formerly of Norwood. Both owners employed farmers to work the land in the district. On this section prior to 1876, a small house with a cellar was built for the workmen consisting of a kitchen (slate floor), dining and bedroom, these rooms form the nucleus of the house today, which is now on another title. The property south of the original house was planted with vines. The varieties were Shiraz, Grenache and Mataro. The working

of the vineyard was with horse drawn implements. Five horses were bought with the property and had been trained by Mr Stock. Bill Rivers can remember one horse called Roger, which was particularly good at his job. He was trained to pull the finishing off plough (which is still on the property today). If by chance the plough hit a vine, the horse would stop until all was righted. The vines were removed in the mid 1950's and the land used for cropping and dairying.

[www.curtisfamilyvineyards.com](http://www.curtisfamilyvineyards.com)

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