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# NAZAARAY

## A WINEMAKER'S DREAM

Stephen Quinn meets India-born, Australian winemaker Paramdeep Ghumman – for whom winemaking is a labour of love – at his winery in the Mornington Peninsula

**Param grew up drinking tea while his French counterparts learned about wine at their father's knee**

**F**or Paramdeep Ghumman, an electrical engineer by profession, the journey to become Australia's only Sikh winemaker was very different from the education of the Burgundian winemakers he so admires. Param grew up drinking tea, while his French counterparts learned about wine at their father's knee. He was aged 30 before he tasted his first glass of wine, champagne, on a flight from India in 1981. That was the year he and his wife Nirmal, a doctor, migrated to Melbourne where he worked in the IT industry and she as a doctor. At the time, Param never thought he would make wines that are currently served at some of Australia's best restaurants.

Param studied electrical engineering in India and worked for major companies such as IBM. When he and his family migrated to Australia, he worked as a software designer and IT consultant. But winemaking was always his passion and he started to learn about it in 1996. He is especially fascinated by the wines of Burgundy and his wines are European in style. His Sauvignon Blanc is more Sancerre than Marlborough, and his Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are decidedly Burgundian.

In 1991 the couple purchased 20 hectares (50 acres) of pastures in the rolling hills near the village of Flinders on the southern tip of the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, about 100 kilometres from Melbourne. The land, previously used to raise beef cattle, was almost bare and Param worked hard to plant trees as windbreaks against the prevailing winds. The property

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did not have electricity and they relied on solar panels initially. The estate features two large railway carriages close to the winery. These were made in the 1930s and are a link to Param's ancestors who worked on India's railways. They also provided accommodation for their daughter's friends for sleepovers because the house the parents built in 1997 was too small to accommodate many visitors.

Paramdeep and Nirmal in the wine cellar, tasting wine from the barrel

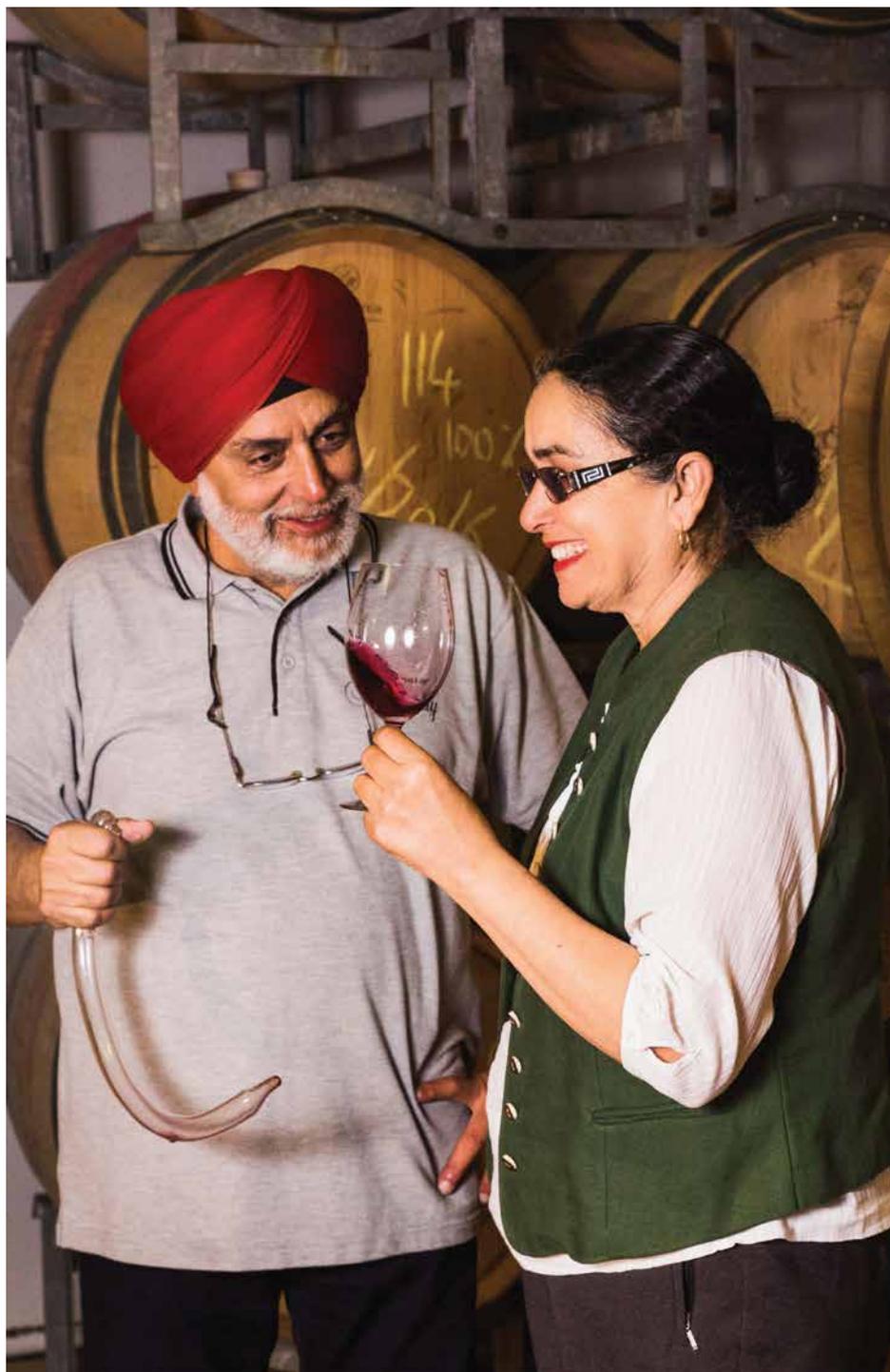
Mornington Peninsula was well-known for its fruit orchards before it became famous for wine in the 1970s. In 1996 Nirmal and Param planted 2.4 hectares (6 acres) of grapes on their land after considering other options such as fruit trees or an olive plantation. They named their estate, Nazaaray, meaning "beautiful vistas" in Punjabi. Nazaaray is the southernmost vineyard on the peninsula.

Two thirds of Param's current 6,100 vines consist of a range of Pinot Noir clones (MV6, 114, 115, D2V5, D2V6, D5V12 and 777 for grape aficionados). Param happily admits, "I love Pinot Noir". The rest of the grapes are Pinot Gris (Param was one of the pioneers of this variety in Australia) along with Chardonnay, Shiraz, Sauvignon Blanc and a tiny plot of Riesling. The last is "for personal consumption, just three or four cases".

Nazaaray Estate is small by Mornington Peninsula standards, producing somewhere between 700 and 900 cases a year, depending on the size of each year's crop. It is one of the few properties in the area where wine is made on-site. This means the grapes are in pristine condition when they enter the winery.

Param follows sustainable principles, though the estate is not organic or biodynamic. His practices include spreading hay in the vineyard as mulch to conserve water, and planting trees to encourage birdlife as insect control.

"We've planted 1,000 Australian native trees between the vine rows to create separate vineyard areas and to harbour desirable insects," he says. Sheep work at keeping overgrown grass in check and also fertilise the vineyard. They are the "baby doll" breed





Above: Nazaaray signpost. Nazaaray means beautiful vistas in Punjabi, the couple's first language. Below: The rolling hills of Nazaaray Estate near the village of Flinders in Victoria on the southern tip of the Mornington Peninsula

whose small stature and tiny feet mean they do not damage vines. Hens also free range around the property. "We encourage animals and insects," Param says. "You should hear the sounds of the frogs at night!"

The estate stopped using chemicals such as pesticides in 2011 when Param believed the vines were sufficiently developed. This was a brave decision because disease had cost him in the past. He had no grapes in 1999 and 2000 and in some years, such as 2014, yields have been very low.

Param stopped irrigating the vines in 2007 to force the roots to go deeper. His land has about one metre of clay, which retains moisture in the hot summers, then deep layers of volcanic basalt which give the wines distinct flavours. Param believes that 85% of wine quality comes from the vineyard. "It's about the true expression of terroir," he said. The vineyard's location and orientation mean that grapes ripen over a long and slow period to produce excellent fruit.

Param likes to use whole bunch fermentation, and varies the percentages of whole bunches depending on the clones. Fermentation takes place in open vats with indigenous yeasts and the fermenting wine is stirred or plunged to extract the best colour and flavours. He presses the fermented must by hand in a basket press to capture the purity of the fruit. Wines are sealed with screw caps and the reds are cellared for about three years prior to release.





Clockwise from above: Small “baby doll” sheep keep overgrown grass in check; grape bunches on the vine; Gum trees are among the 1,000 native trees on the estate. Trees planted between vine rows demarcate different vineyard areas such as Param’s Folly





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The Ghummans are hands-on at the Estate, working in the vineyard as well as serving wine paired with Indian food at their quarterly tiffin lunch buffet. Pinot Noir is Param's favourite wine

Nazaaray wines are available for tasting by appointment at the cellar door, which has a viewing deck overlooking the estate from where one can see the pristine blue of the Pacific ocean. Kangaroos often bound through the paddocks, according to visitors. The rolling hills are mostly farmland dotted with eucalyptus gums, which give a distinctly Australian perfume in summer.

Param's first release of Pinot Noir was in 2001. When I visited in January 2018, three 2013 Pinot Noirs were available for tasting. Blend 1, with its attractive aromas of raspberries and morello cherries, is mostly a combination of the MV6, 114 and 115 clones. It was bottled in May 2015 after 20 months in older French oak. The Blend 2 clone is 70% MV6 with the balance being D clones. It also spent 20 months in French oak barrels, of which 40% are new.

The flagship Family Reserve label relates to wines "which meet and exceed our expectations", says Param. This wine spent 22 months in French oak, of which 60% were new. The Family Reserve contains a touch of Pinot Meunier, the grape commonly used in champagne. Last May, Nazaaray Estate's Reserve Pinot Noir 2015 won the people's choice award at the 17th International Cool Climate Wine Show, from the 544 wines entered. The same wine also won a silver medal at the London International Wine Challenge.

All the pinots have subtle aromas centred on quality fruit. The wine is built around a structure of silky tannins from the oak. This means the wines could be cellared for up to 10 years for the first two wines, and up to 15 years for the Reserve. The 2014 Pinot Noir has more concentrated fruit because of low yields that year, so the tannins seem less pronounced because of the depth of the fruit. This is another fine wine.

Special mention must be made of the 2016 Chardonnay which is like a quality Meursault from Burgundy at about half the price. Param employs malolactic fermentation for this grape to enhance the richness and flavour, along with judicious use of new oak.

Every three months as a link with the home country, the Ghummans offer a tiffin lunch buffet to show that Indian food pairs well with wine. ❖

*Tasting notes can be found at the winery's web site [nazaaray.com.au](http://nazaaray.com.au)*



## GETTING THERE

Surrounded by water on three sides, the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria is just one hour from Melbourne. It may not be as well known as the Barossa Valley in South Australia or the Margaret River region in Western Australia, but it is noted for its cool climate wines, especially Pinot Noir. Continuous production began in the early

1970s after failed attempts in the '20s and '50s.

The Mornington produces only a small percentage of the total Australia vintage, probably about 2%, but like the Margaret River region the wines are of high quality and win a large proportion of awards.

When you visit, walk along pristine

beaches or spectacular cliff tops, catch a wave, paddle a sea kayak, tackle the fairway at Cape Schanck, visit the thermal hot springs or even sail in Port Phillip Bay. Drink wine and feel the difference in the Mornington Peninsula wine region.

*For more see [mpva.com.au](http://mpva.com.au)*