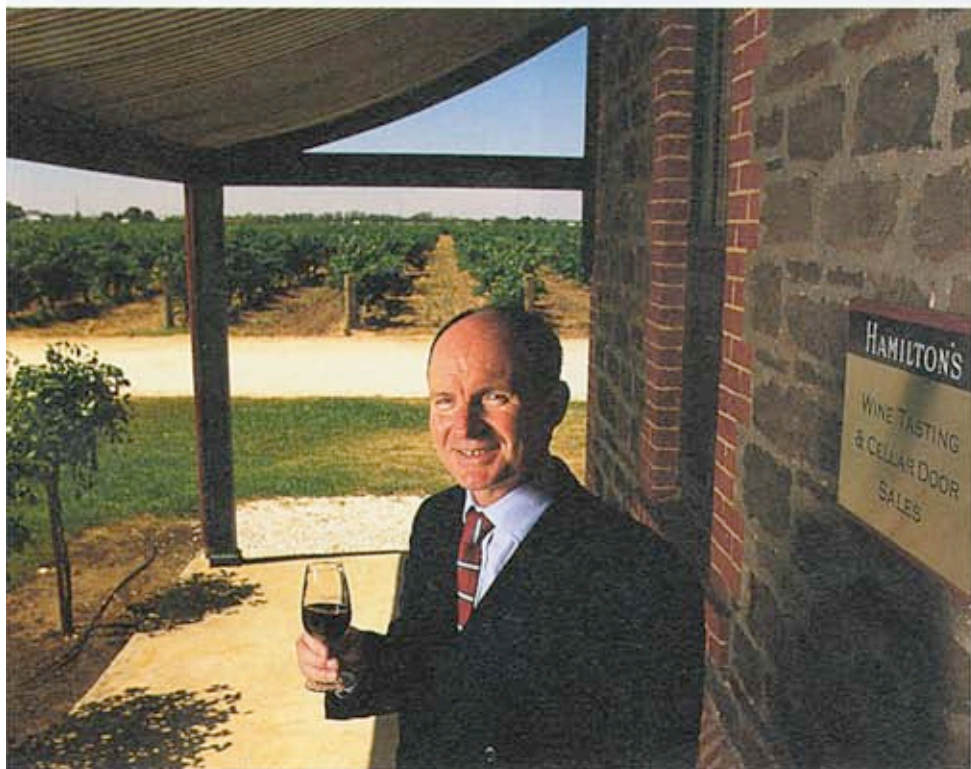


THE good drop

NOTES FROM THE TASTING ROOM

BY JEREMY OLIVER

Ewell be praised



Robert Hamilton grew, made and sold good wine there under his own name until 1993, when these assets were bought by Mark and his wife Deborah. Mark Hamilton took his first plunge into vineyard ownership in 1990, buying several small Barossa vineyards between then and 1993, when he renamed the Springton vineyard as Stonegarden, a label he reserves for a deep, spicy grenache made from its 100-year-old vines. After several years of exhaustive negotiations he took undisputed ownership of the Hamilton's Ewell brand in 1998 and, with his father taking an overview of winemaking processes, Mark Hamilton operates a new business under his family's original historic name. The first full range of Hamilton's Ewell wines was made in 1998 and includes a couple of densely structured and intensely flavored shirazes crafted in the modern super-ripe style. The Railway Shiraz 1998 is luxuriant and smooth, bursting with spicy ripe berry fruit and vanilla oak, while the Fuller's Barn Shiraz 1998 is thicker, darker and even riper with flavors in the plum/prune and bitumen end of the spectrum. Made from 25-year-old vines, they're too thick and spirity for my taste, but at \$26 per bottle will win legions of followers.

Hamilton's Ewell (which is a separate business from the very successful Hamilton Wine Group owned and operated by Richard Hamilton) now owns vineyards in the Barossa, Eden Valley, Wrattonbully and Nildottie. Mark Hamilton has no idea how far this will grow, but he says it's more than just a business. "When you spend your Saturdays as a boy exploring wineries with your father, it gets in your blood," he says. But with a name like his, it hardly has to.

Remember way back when, when wines such as Springton Claret, Hermitage Dry Red, Springton Riesling and Hamilton's Ewell Moselle were a standard feature of every pub bottle shop? Or when Hamilton's Gold Label Whisky was one of the three best-selling Australian brands? This was back before 1979, the year Mildara purchased Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards. The sale of his family business deeply hurt Mark Hamilton, a young Adelaide solicitor and a sixth-generation direct descendent of the founder, Richard Hamilton. He had dared to imagine that, in time, the business would be his to run. Ever since Richard Hamilton made South Australia's first wine in 1841, having settled there with his family four years earlier, the Hamilton name has been entwined with the history of South Australian wine. The family business became known as Hamilton's Ewell vineyards after Richard's eldest son, Henry, planted his first vines on a property named Ewell, after a village in Surrey. By

Brand anew: For Adelaide solicitor Mark Hamilton winemaking is more than just a business

the time of its sale to Mildara, Hamilton's Ewell operated vineyards in the Eden Valley, Nildottie (on the Murray in South Australia) and at Wood Wood near Swan Hill in Victoria, plus wineries at Ewell (Adelaide), Eden Valley and Nildottie. But less than a decade after its entry into the Mildara Blass stable, the name of Hamilton's Ewell was but a distant memory. Fate began to move in Mark Hamilton's favor in 1982 when his father, Robert, the last chairman and managing director of Hamilton's Ewell Vineyards, bounced out of premature retirement and bought back from Mildara the family's old vineyard and winery in the Eden Valley village of Springton.

Winespeak

racy a greyhound of a wine: trim, taut and terrific, with a long, lean palate structure typically finishing with refreshing, bracing acidity. Examples? Try a 1999 sauvignon blanc from Marlborough (New Zealand), or a youthful Clare Valley riesling from a maker such as Grosset, Knappstein, Pikes, Sevenhill or Mount Horrocks.