



mij patterson and liv maiorana south by south west wines margaret river, AUS

Cool air coming in from the ocean surrounds the small coastal town of Margaret River, south of Perth in Western Australia, on three sides and keeps temperatures mild and consistent; thick shrubs and trees protect the vineyards from strong winds; low humidity means less likelihood of bugs and pests, and therefore less need for pesticides. It's up there with the best regions for winemaking in Australia, which is the simple factor that attracted Mij Patterson and her partner Liv Maiorana to come here in 2016 to start their own vineyard.

Liv, a graphic designer by trade, had already worked in wine and it wasn't long before Mij, a chemical engineer, caught the bug. After working at vineyards in Italy, California and Canada, the couple decided to return to Australia and set up their own winery. More than just a business prospect, it was a chance for a more healthy way of living and working.

'We had both spent our previous careers in office buildings,' says Mij. 'We really started to appreciate how [as a winemaker] you could actually see the life cycle of a grape and the product at the end. It's tactile and hands-on.' What's more, Mij continues, 'If the surf is banging one day, we can be at the ocean in 10 minutes. There is great hiking, beautiful forests and good mountain biking as well. We often nip away for a weekend or a couple of nights camping.'

While in Europe most vineyards are either inherited or purchased, Australia – being part of the 'new world' of winemaking and under less regulation – has fewer barriers to entry; for example, there's no need to grow your own grapes, own oak barrels or tick other centuries-old boxes. With an initial investment of around AUD\$100,000 (£55,000), the couple began purchasing grapes from surrounding producers in the area and leased a space in a shared winemaking facility. 'It has equipment that we can all use. We can keep our barrels there, we can bottle the wine there,'

says Mij. 'If we go away for a couple of weeks, there are staff for whom we can leave instructions. It's an efficient and achievable way for small-batch winemakers to make their wine. Owning all the equipment yourself becomes really expensive.'

Despite saving on costs, they waited a year until they started paying themselves a salary, and they waited until 2017 to sell their first bottles. They worked long hours, too. The business – which they named South by South West Wines (often shortened to SXSW) – has no employees and Liv and Mij do all the work themselves, aside from the few seasonal workers they bring on to help during harvest. Liv takes care of the winemaking, while Mij handles the business and logistics side. Naturally, as a graphic designer, Liv does all of the branding and labels. 'I did a sketch on a piece of paper that was an abstract of an aerial [view] of this region: it incorporated the ocean, the jagged edge of the southwest coastline, the big splotches of vineyards and grapes. That's where our very first visual reference came from,' she says.

SXSW produces an array of wines, from the chardonnay the region is acclaimed for to lesser-known varieties such as Tuscan sangiovese, a nod to Liv's Italian roots. What links them together is the quality of grape: by and large, winemakers agree that you can never produce a wine that's better than the base ingredient, and their low-intervention winemaking process brings that to the fore.

'The quality of the fruit that comes from Margaret River and the wider Great Southern region is regarded as really high. The wine produced here often goes to a boutique market as opposed to a bulk market,' says Mij. Although the region produces just 2% to 3% of Australia's grapes, it accounts for 25% of the country's premium market, sold through independent bottle shops, restaurants and hotels. However, smaller