



The Macpherson family:
(from left) Zara, Elissa,
Ewen, Hamish and James.



OUR LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

A ZEST FOR ADVENTURE AND A PASSION FOR GOOD WINE SAW EWEN AND ELISSA MACPHERSON TAKE THE PLUNGE AND CREATE A WINEMAKING BUSINESS WITH HEART AND A LIFE IN TUNE WITH THEIR VALUES.

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EWEN MACPHERSON promised a lifetime of adventure when he proposed to his future wife, Elissa. The couple had known each other since they were 12 and had even been high-school sweethearts for a time. True to his word, the couple later embarked on overseas travel and then a 1996 spur-of-the-moment tree change. After settling in the Ballandean Highlands of Southern Queensland, Ewen and Elissa created their thriving business, Symphony Hill Wines. Sharing in the adventure are their sons — James, 13, and Hamish, 10 — and daughter Zara, 6.

The decision to move from Brisbane came after a weekend visiting the Granite Belt's vineyards inspired Ewen to consider a new career. The computer programmer decided that he wanted to make wine and the couple soon bought their first block of land at Ballandean.

Symphony Hill Wines is testament to what can be achieved with passion, creativity and hard work. Ewen and Elissa knew little about the industry when they started but their family business now produces award-winning wines made from cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, pinot noir, verdelho, chardonnay and viognier grapes.

After Symphony Hill created its first blend of shiraz and cabernet, Ewen decided to name it 'Danying' after their daughter, whom the couple adopted from China in March 2004.

"With Zara Danying we have made our family a blend of cultures, just the same as the wine is also a blend of two varieties," he explains. Ten per cent of the wine's sales go to support the organisation AKID (Asian Kids in Danger). *Symphony Hill Wines is at 2017 Eukey Road, Ballandean Queensland. (07) 4684 1388.*

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elissa Ewen and I were sweethearts on and off in high school. I went straight to university in Brisbane after school and Ewen went overseas. We were always kindred spirits and used to discuss what we would do when we were adults.

The Sunshine Coast was still undeveloped then: I could hear the surf at night. I liked having a lot of space and still crave that. But I knew I wanted the city experience first, and that there was a whole world I wanted to explore.

We were settled in Brisbane and came here to visit for Ewen's 30th birthday. We'd always loved wine and heard that Queensland wine was doing interesting things. Less than six weeks later, we had bought our first 16 hectares. I was happy to go along for the ride. When Ewen proposed, he promised a life of adventure — and he's stuck to that!

The country life sneaks up on you. It was a shock going back to the city and realising how acclimatised I was to living here. People in the city would ask to check my signature on my credit card whereas they all know me here.

It was hard setting up a business with a young family. We had also started an adoption procedure with our third child. We finally received the call to travel to China when we were just about to open our cellar door in 2004. It was a really intense time as our new daughter, Zara Danying, was settling in while we were trying to open the outlet.

In 2006 we travelled to South India with AKID, a very small grassroots group made up of volunteers. The big connection for me was with China and India — they have the highest female infanticide rates. AKID has become my passion and our business reflects that.

When you make really beautiful wine it's easy to sell. It's an extension of us, not just a product. It's a lot of hard work but we divide it up so we're all working on the right things. Ewen and our winemaker, Mike Hayes, have the science, while I help creatively — my strengths are reading the trends and engaging with the customers.

I have started writing in response to being here. I took up walking and used that time to pray and meditate. Living with nature deepens your spirituality and I have had to express that. I recently wrote and self-published a devotional book, *Beautiful*. There is a wildness and mystery in living close to nature. The sky is so big here and there are no interruptions in it. You feel diminutive and I love that!

ewen I grew up on acreage at the Sunshine Coast and had the best childhood — long bush treks and camping. My dream was to leave the city and create >



TOP ROW, FROM LEFT Ripening grapes from the four hectares Symphony Hill has planted in vines; Elissa at the winery's cellar door; in the barrel room, an angel, bought in Brisbane, points the way to Ewen's planned wine cave. MIDDLE ROW Zara gathers wildflowers; Ewen heads for the homestead. BOTTOM ROW An antique rocking horse rests on the verandah; the boys survey their bush playground; flocks of yellow daisies spring up everywhere. FACING PAGE The Macpherson family in front of an old barn on the property.





Hamish, Zara and James share a favourite pastime. RIGHT Symphony Hill Wine's award-winning produce.



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a similar upbringing for our kids, but I didn't know what shape that would take.

Before we left on that first weekend, we visited a real estate agency and told them what we were looking for. It was pure providence, as the property we later purchased happened to be one of the best locations on the Granite Belt for wine production. Within three months of the initial visit, I was enrolled in a viticulture applied science degree.

I came here knowing nothing about the Queensland wine industry. I thought of it as a great adventure — and my parents decided to join us and have been an integral part of the whole process

The country here is so different from where I grew up — granite boulders and grass trees and more brown than green. It's a very cold climate with four seasons. Winter can get down to minus 12 degrees because of the elevation — if we were 1000 metres lower, we'd be growing pineapples rather than grapes! Every New Year's Eve we have a bonfire and are always back inside by 10pm — it's too cold.

Being in the country has really enriched the lives of our family. I love a family campfire with the Milky Way so bright it looks like mist. You don't really get to see the stars in the city. It's given us the opportunity to experiment and do things we've never done before.

Elissa always wanted an MG for her 40th birthday but instead we travelled to South India and ended up visiting the slums of Bangalore. AKID supports a program there that takes kids from the slums and gives them a meal, an education and an occupation. The program is absolutely working. I felt enlightened and it was so exciting to see people making such a huge difference, one life at a time.

It started with a passion to create great wine and has gone every step from growing to the manufacturing process and marketing. We have a fabulous winemaker and Elissa has been very creative in designing the labels — the look and feel plus the branding.

In 2005 our Reserve Shiraz was the highest-scoring red wine at the Sydney Royal Wine Show. It was the first time a Queensland wine had won a gold medal in Sydney. We didn't realise then what a big deal that was! It was our second vintage and the vines were just four years old.

Great wine is grown in the vineyard. Our driving passion is to make beautiful wine and there are a lot of different things that have to come in right for the end product to be fabulous. That is the challenge and excitement of the business. Symphony Hill Wines is born out of the dream to sit back and drink and think, 'Bloody hell, we made that!' *