



R Y M I L L
C O O N A W A R R A

GABRIEL STERK

Two magnificent bronze stallions rampant, created by the noted sculptor Gabriel Sterk, welcome visitors to the Rymill Coonawarra Winery. They not only represent the equestrian traditions of the Rymill family, but their image also appears on each bottle of our wine.

Gabriel sculpted the original in clay at his studio near Paris, prior to its being cast in bronze at a foundry in Holland, and then shipped to Australia. He accompanied his stallions to Coonawarra, ensuring their safe arrival, and attended to the final details of placing them in their new location.

Gabriel Sterk's life and career have alternated between Europe and Australia. Born in Holland in 1942, he emigrated to Adelaide with his family in 1958, aged fifteen, where he attended Marist Brothers' College. From there he won an open painting prize for portraiture, and also a scholarship to the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts. Although he still remembers Adelaide with affection for the important part it played in nurturing his vocation, his developing career and talent soon drew him back to the art treasures of Europe; first of all to Italy, and then to the Royal Academy in Holland where, as a nineteen year-old student, he made a gradual transition from painting to sculpture.

He returned to Adelaide in 1979, and many will remember his gallery in Hahndorf, in the Adelaide Hills, with its surrounding paddocks which were often startlingly occupied by magnificent bronze figures, both human and equine. However, the attractions and opportunities of Europe called yet again, and in 1987 he settled in the delightful medieval farmhouse and modern studio just outside Paris where he now lives with his wife Florence and their family.



The countryside has always been important to Gabriel, and his work is frequently inspired by nature. Amongst his earliest childhood memories in Holland are thoroughbred horses at play when they were let out into the fields of the nearby Rothschild Stud at Haarzuilens, and the strange shapes and mysterious forms of the ancient trees in the surrounding park. Other significant influences for his award-winning equestrian sculptures have been derived from such diverse sources as the wild Camargue stallions of the Rhône delta, the Chinese equestrian statues of the T'ang dynasty, and an intimate knowledge and understanding of his own horses.

Horses have also been important to the Rymill family, and in fact were an integral part of their business for a number of generations. Their property was renowned last century for breeding Indian Army cavalry remounts which, at one stage, were broken-in and prepared for their long sea voyage by the now-famous local horseman

and poet, Adam Lindsay Gordon. Indeed, the terra rossa soil of the Limestone Coast, or South East, of South Australia, with its high calcium content, raised horses with strong bones and powerful constitutions long before it became famous for the excellence of its vineyards and wines.

The present members of the Rymill family have maintained this equestrian tradition, both with stock horses to muster cattle on their property, and also in the competitive field. Judy rode overseas in three-day events, and both she and her husband Peter, who won the Australian Championship in 1967, have represented Australia internationally in the show jumping arena.

Today, the statue of the stallions at the Rymill Coonawarra winery is dedicated to the proud memory of these horses, and the part they played in both the development and tradition of the Coonawarra region of Australia.