



Global forces don't daunt those who have already faced down fate.

Optimists beat odds

FROM the time he was born nine years ago, Marcus Dadd has overcome a daunting list of major health problems, including deafness.

A bionic ear has given him hearing and speech and he has tackled other health issues with pluck and tenacity – emerging as a bright, active, soccer-playing schoolboy who has also put a stamp on his parents' foray into winegrowing.

That stamp is mirrored in the name – Optimiste – which Sharlene and Steve Dadd chose for their range of Mudgee boutique wines.

It is also shown in the Optimiste flagship red, a Bordeaux-style blend of 50 per cent cabernet sauvignon, 30 per cent merlot and 20 per cent petit verdot.

It is called Marquis in tribute to Marcus and the wine's current-release 2006 vintage is reviewed today in Uncorked.

The Dadds' continuing inspiration is this quote: "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence."

The words are those of Helen Keller, the blind and deaf American woman who overcame her disabilities to become an internationally acclaimed author and exemplar for the handicapped.

Sharlene, 42, and Steve, 43, are Sydneysiders who have had a long fascination for wine.

Sharlene worked in the hotel and tourism industry and Steve is a chemical engineer and Master of Business Administration, who worked for CSR and then the Boston Group in London and Jakarta.

The Dadds spent two years in Indonesia before returning to Australia for Steve to take up his present post as general manager of Boral Hardwoods.

In 1997 they took the first step towards a hands-on involvement in wine by buying a former sheep farm high up in the hills on the south-east side of Mudgee.

In 1998 Sharlene and Steve planted the first

vines of what has now become an 11-hectare cabernet sauvignon, merlot and petit verdot vineyard.

They produced their first commercial grape crop in 2000, selling that vintage and those of the following six years to such producers as Arrowfield and Petersons.

In 2007 they decided to launch their own Optimiste wine label and enlisted Arrowfield chief winemaker, Barry Kooij, to make the wine.

Young Mudgee-based winemaker Michael Slater took over in 2008 and has also made the 2009 vintage.

Although continuing to live and work in Sydney, Sharlene and Steve have expanded their Mudgee landholdings to 71 hectares and spend as much time as they can on the property with Marcus and their seven-year-old daughter Helena.

Parents, children, friends and relatives all pitch in when grapes are ready for hand picking and other vital vineyard tasks come around.

The estate-sourced current-release wines are the 2006 Marquis, the \$18 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon and 2006 Petit Verdot, a rare 100 per cent example of this classic Bordeaux blend variety.

The Dadds also buy in chardonnay, shiraz, pinot gris, semillon, viognier and tempranillo grapes for other wines in their range.

Sharlene, who is Optimiste's marketing manager, says she and Steve love being part of the Mudgee wine scene and are proud of the district's near-150-year wine history.

And Sharlene has a message that suits



these tough times: "It is easy to become negative about the wine industry outlook, but in our business and in our lives we have so much to be optimistic about."

The Dadds' optimism will see them soon

opening their own cellar door – which will bring to 35 the number of such sales outlets in the Mudgee area.

Further information on Optimiste wines can be found at www.optimiste.com.au.



ALL HANDS ON DECK: Above, Marcus Dadd (left) and his Newcastle pal Alessandro Roncolato, 8, at work hand-picking grapes in the Optimiste vineyard. Below, Sharlene and Steve Dadd.

