

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT



**CELEBRITY FACTOR:** Tim Lightbourne, Graham Norton and Rob Cameron.

By Colleen Thorpe

**I**NVIVO WINES was founded in 2008 by mates Rob Cameron (winemaker) and Tim Lightbourne. Their aim was to create approachable wines that appealed both to those new to wine and to the connoisseurs, all without the unnecessary complexity often associated with wine . . . and, importantly, have a bit of fun doing it.

After supplying the *Graham Norton Show* with sauvignon blanc in 2011, the Irish comedian became a brand ambassador and the first vintage of Graham Norton's Own Sauvignon

Blanc was produced in 2014 in collaboration with Norton himself selecting the final blends.

I asked Rob and Tim a few questions:

## How did Invivo come about?

Invivo was founded in 2008 by me, Tim Lightbourne, and Rob Cameron (Invivo's winemaker). We met up for a beer in London in 2006 to catch up after a few years. We started discussing launching our own winery. Unlike most ideas that are thought of over a

few drinks, we actually followed through and launched this one. We were big fans of New Zealand wine, so thought why not start our own winery. However, we knew from the start we had to approach our brand a bit differently. Right from the label — fashion icon Zambesi designed our label — through some of the marketing activities we would do, often on a small budget. We choose one of the worst times in history to launch a wine business, start of the GFC, banks at the time weren't exactly lining up, and it was the largest harvest of sauvignon blanc in history.

What helped was Rob's skill as a winemaker. We won some top awards for our wine early on, so this helped build credibility.

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## Who came up with the name?

We came up with the name after a brainstorming session in London that may have been alcohol assisted. Thankfully some of the other names we thought of weren't chosen.

## How did you manage to get Graham Norton on board?

We gave him some wine and asked him politely if would he like to make a wine with us. He liked wine and said yes.

## How involved is Graham with the brand?

We visited the *Graham Norton Show* over the years and said hi to Graham backstage a couple of times after the show in the greenroom. We were providing the wine every week to his show. Graham, his guests and the green room all have our wine. In 2014 we approached him about producing a wine in his name.

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He wanted to be fully involved so that's when we came up with the idea of blending the wine with him, so he could choose his final blend, rather than just a name on the label. He loves it and is very involved in the blending process.

## Tell us more about the wine

The Graham Norton Sauvignon Blanc is from Marlborough and it's a combination of three different

growers. In Graham's words, "It is easy drinking. It's got all the grassiness and zest you expect from a new world sauvignon blanc but I like to think it has a bit of an old world finish. Oh, and it's affordable."

We are proud the wine has been awarded accolades for quality, two gold medals, five-star ratings and recently chosen for Qantas business class. Last year we had quite a bit of demand to produce a "Graham Norton" red so we're launching a new shiraz from South Australian growers we have partnered with. We're very much looking forward to this launch.

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## How successful have the blends been?

The wine has been selling very well. It's available nationwide in Ireland, UK, Australia and New Zealand. In Ireland it is one of the best-selling white wines in the country, achieved in less than 12 months. They love Graham and his wine. In Australia, the wine has recently been listed in more than 1000 BWS stores. Here in New Zealand we have partnered with Lion which is selling both the Graham Norton and Invivo brands. In the past 12 months, more than 500,000 bottles have been sold.

## Where do you source the grapes?

Marlborough for the sauvignon and South Australia for the shiraz.

## What is the ideal food match for your wines?

Smoked salmon and shellfish are great with the sauvignon

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blanc, particularly the acidity of the sauvignon cuts through the oiliness of the smoked

salmon. For the shiraz, BBQ lamb or beef works very well.

## What's your favourite tippie?

Depending on the occasion, Marlborough sauvignon blanc, Gisborne chardonnay or an Aussie shiraz.

## Tell us something about yourselves that would surprise

**Tim:** When we started up, things were so tough we used to stay on mates' couches when we visited our customers in the UK. Often attending high end wine events and then going back to a couch or floor was always interesting.

**Rob:** Made wine in Moldova for three years where he had former KGB minders complete with guns and knives. Despite poor harvests, a lot of vodka, water shortages and constant power outages he made a Moldovan rose which became a UK best-seller!

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