



Know-How Worth Bottling

By: David Rymer



In 2002 - 03 more people will drink Australian wine overseas than locally, according to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics. This supports my suspicion that there are few knowledge issues which can't be resolved by a glass (or two) of wine.

Our wine industry is an example of how successive waves of knowledge can stimulate an industry. Historically, France dominated global wine exports. French culture is based on a reverence for good food accompanied by good wine.

Secure in their dominance and lulled by centuries of rich wine making tradition, French wine houses disparaged innovation, denigrating any move to demystify wine for consumers.

Then along came a new world upstart - Australia. Unable to compete with France's cultural legacy, Australian winemakers glimpsed a future built on a

lifestyle shift towards flavour, consistency, quality, and value for money supported by our "clean and green" reputation.

Initially the way to this "low trust, high touch" consumerism was thought to lie with technology. Innovative wine makers pushed the boundaries of wine science and new equipment (we won't mention the wine cask!).

Some of this knowledge went into corporate databases. Some was hand written into well worn tasting notebooks held together with sticky tape and glue. Some - well quite a lot really, entered the subconscious in liquid form during long nights with friends over a good feed and a couple of bottles from the last vintage!

By the mid 1990's, our wine makers had proven their technical virtuosity. In 1996 the Australian wine industry launched 'Strategy 2025'. Its vision - \$4.5 billion

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in sales committed Australia to "innovation and style from vine to palate".

Wine makers soon discovered technology had its limitations - a common experience for many industries in their early knowledge development phase. Wine needed more effective industry and consumer knowledge to penetrate international markets and win over spoilt for choice overseas consumers. Out went dinner with friends and in came celebrity chief cook books, corporate lunches, a fascination with fresh young reds and ponytails.

Methodically, the Australian Wine Corporation set about refining our "New World" brand proposition that wine should be appealingly packaged, with an easily understood label, has consistent grape character and be priced to enable more people to enjoy it.

The contrast between French reliance on "traditional" winemaking knowledge and Australia's consumer-driven knowledge was brought home by lines of British supermarket shelves - long dominated by the great French houses overflowing with Australian labels.

Predictably, this success ushered in a third knowledge wave. Wine tourism and consumer demand for new wine experiences fostered the emergence of boutique wineries built around climate. Thus was born the Moss Vale, Orange and Canberra regions with their cool climate Shiraz, crisp Riesling and stylish pinot noirs. Boutique wineries also led the way with less well known grape varieties like chambourcin, viognier and sangiovese.

In came barbeques, laid back conversations at the cellar door over tastings and web sites!

Finally, Australia has come full circle. We have found a rich market niche for our winemaking expertise. It is not unusual to encounter expatriate Australian winemakers working in countries as diverse as France, the United States, South Africa and Chile.

Summary

Knowledge is often a precursor to innovation. However, Australian winemakers did not deliberately set out en masse to create a knowledge driven export success story. They simply wanted to make great wines which everyone could afford to buy and enjoy.

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Knowledge simply proved a useful means
to an end.

So, the next time you ease the cork from
a soothing bottle of Australian pinot noir,

take a moment to reflect on the diverse
know-how that produced it and savour the
simple pleasure that comes from seriously
infuriating the French!

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