

Function Report - AGM at Bruce County Hotel

17th July 2007 **Guests: Peter and Ann Beckingham of Beckingham Wines.**

The Annual General Meeting of the Wines Services Guild of Australia, (Vic) Inc. was held at Hotel Bruce County on 17th July 2007. 36 members and guests attended the meeting and function that followed the business part of the evening.

We were pleased to have Peter and Ann Beckingham of Beckingham Wines as our guests for the evening. Peter and Ann brought along a selection of their wines, and addressed the group as a whole, as well as speaking individually with those present about the wines and their business.

Beckingham Wines is a family owned, urban winery, located in Moorabbin. Peter and Ann are passionate about their wine making. They source grapes from trusted growers, because great grapes are needed to make great wine. At the winery the grapes are crushed, fermented, matured and bottled.

Peter and Ann selected **1999 "Pas de Deux" Sparkling** to greet guests on arrival. Peter gave us a potted history of his firm (which is paraphrased below) and then invited us to try two unlabelled white wines. We were advised that the sparkling wine we were drinking had been kept on lees for seven years, and was a blend of the unlabelled Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes that we were tasting. It was interesting to taste the individual wines and compare them with the final result. Peter also spoke to each table about methode champenoise, demonstrating with a bottle the elements of the secondary fermentation process.

Peter told us how he came to set up Beckingham Wines. Rather than try and recall what he said, I have quoted extensively from Beckingham Wines' web site.

"I have been passionate about food and wine since I left university where I studied chemical engineering - the best course for a wine-maker after a degree in ecology. At the age of 39 I was just getting ready for my mid-life crisis.

My wife noticed an ad in the paper for a wine-making course at Box Hill TAFE, so I went. It introduced me to the Bianchet family who ran a winery in Lilydale. I took leave from work and worked the 1992 vintage (for free), as a lackey, picking grapes, helping crush them, press them, and so on.

I had been well and truly bitten by the bug.

In 1993, I ordered enough grapes to make a barrel of Shiraz, a barrel of Cabernet and some Sparkling.

1993 was a magic year in the Yarra Valley. The wines made themselves and survived my interference to be excellent wines even today. Suddenly I had volunteers who wanted to come and help make wine. Over two years my wine-making group swelled to 15 people who were keen to share the work, the expense and the finished product.

The crush went from one tonne in 1993, to three tonnes, to five tonnes, to seven tonnes in 1996. This was all happening in the drive-way at home. I had taken over the basement, the double garage and my study for the purposes of making wine.

1997 was a very difficult year. It was a drought in the Yarra Valley and we were not able to obtain any red grapes at all. A friend in the Strathbogie Ranges said I could follow their mechanical harvester and take whatever was left behind. We were picking individual berries rather than bunches. However the wines we made were stunning. Our 1997 Cabernet won the trophy for the Best Red at the Seymour Show with our 1997 Shiraz being runner-up. The Traminer from the same vineyard was runner up for the trophy at the Lilydale Show. These wines won Best Red, Best White and Best Wine of the Show at Eltham late in 1997.

By this stage, the wine-making equipment was halfway down the drive-way and my normally patient wife had just about had enough. She loved the wine but the aromas and mess were becoming too much. We agreed that some factory space would be a good idea so we searched and found our current address just prior to the 1998 vintage.

It was around this time that the idea of turning this into a business started to evolve. A liquor licence seemed a sensible move then we could sell some wine and cover some of the overheads. We had a considerable amount of capital tied up in the factory building. I had just won a number of trophies and medals so we thought we could make wine commercially at least from the manufacturing perspective.

Next came the red tape that followed the official formation of Beckingham Wines Pty Ltd. We had to obtain a liquor licence and for that we had to get a planning permit. The Fire Brigade had to do fire safety audits and the Council made us qualify as a food factory. They didn't actually know what to do with us. It was the first time anyone had applied to set up a winery in Moorabbin.

The challenges of starting up a small business continue. This includes building a web site and generally becoming known in the quality-end of the wine-making industry. We have had ten good vintages at our Warrigal Road winery and look forward to seeing people at the cellar door on weekends (or by appointment during the week). The factory complex has plenty of parking available.” www.beckinghamwines.com.au

Peter uses screw caps to seal the bottles of still wine. He told us that since moving away from corks, he has had virtually no bottles returned because of oxidization.

Hotel Bruce County presented an a la carte menu for this occasion. Entrée was a choice of Crumbed Scallops with a mango and coriander mayonnaise and lemon; Shredded Duck with an exotic mushroom and pea risotto; or Warm Satay Beef Salad. Beckingham **2005 Semillon** and **2005 White Pinot** were chosen to accompany the entrée. The White Pinot was a lightly coloured pink wine made by limiting the skin contact. Peter told us that the wine is made as a rosé style by limiting skin contact with the grape juice for between 12 and 24 hours.

Peter served a **2003 Cornelia Creek Merlot**, a **2003 Cornelia Creek Shiraz** and **2003 Beckingham Reserve Shiraz** with the main course. The wines were excellent and complemented the dishes served: Beef Fillet wrapped in prosciutto; Chicken Breast with preserved lemon and thyme; or a Herb Crusted Veal Schnitzel. All mains were served with appropriate vegetables, and were delightful. For sweets we were given the choice of a cheese platter; a chocolate fondant or a warm blackberry and apple crumble.

Most Annual General Meetings are long, drawn out, boring affairs. The business dealings were taken care of within ten minutes, as we had no contentious matters to deal with, and the finances are comfortably under control.

The Guild thanks Ann and Peter Beckingham for introducing us to their wines. Members are urged to visit the winery in Moorabbin and try some more of their wines – details on web site. We also appreciate the professionalism of Hotel Bruce County – the food was a marvellous accompaniment to the excellent wines we enjoyed, and contributed to another successful dinner and wine tasting.