



March 2025

www.fawg.org.au

What's on at this months FAWG Meeting:

G'Day All, And welcome to the silly season for winemakers,

I have been able to take off the truckies blue singlet today as our grapes are coming in at unpredicted rates and times, the shiraz is hitting good baume and the Fiano just getting there so it's important to do your testing and share your results around via Whatsapp with the other members who have bought the same grape.

Anybody out with results should be double checking their equipment and retesting.

I have to say that the club is in a sweet spot with me being able to handle the transport, having the nally bins to pick up machined picked grapes using the bin liners to keep them fresh, and above all else having Kevin Murphy with his factory and machinery with his great humour, it all makes it pleasurable.

Along with the range of varieties it should make for a good year, and I expect to see some lovely wines show their heads at our show and meetings.

On that note about the meetings, it is left to too few in bringing supper to share.

If you could make a conscious effort to bring a plate of something or a bottle of your crafted wine to share with the members it would make the night much more enjoyable, especially with the wine the guild often supplies for tasting and discussion.

Cheers for now Glen

In this issue

• FAWG calendar	2
• Cordon Corner	3
• Maltese Intro	4-6
• My vintage year	6-10
• Member offer	11
• Sponsors and supporters	12

Coming Up

Saturday 8th March 8:30am-5pm
Red Hill Agricultural Show at Red Hill Showgrounds \$25:00
<https://www.ticketebo.com.au/red-hill-agricultural-horticultural-society/97th-red-hill-show>

Saturday 8th-Monday 10th March 2pm
Merrick Watts-An Idiot's guide to Wine-2
The Speigeltent in the Garden of Uneathly Delights at the Adelaide Fringe Festival \$65
<https://melbournewinery.com.au/product/grape-crushin-event/>

Sunday 9th March noon-3pm
Peninsula Piers & Pinots at Flinders Foreshore Reserve \$65.00
<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/peninsula-piers-pinots-2025-tickets-1113372680659>

Friday 21st March- 30th March
Melbourne Food and Wine Festival-lots of events
<https://www.melbournefoodandwine.com.au/>

Sunday 30th March
Melbourne Winery Flinders Lane 3 course meal with paired wines and Grape Crushin' Event \$139.00
<https://melbournewinery.com.au/product/grape-crushin-event/>

FAWG Calendar

Meeting Date	Club night Activity	Competition	Tasting Talk	Industry/Event	Committee Date
March 11th	Improving your liquors and fortified	No Comp	My Maltese and Sicillian journey		Tues 4th Zoom 7pm
April 8 th		Gordon Evans white wine mini comp		Autumn Winemakers lunch To be finalized	Tues 1st zoom 7pm
May 13th		Chris Myers Red wine mini comp		Wine Tour with Eltham To be finalized	Tues 6 th Zoom 7pm
June 10th		Sheila Lee Liqueur & Fortified Mini comp			Tues 3 rd Zoom 7pm
July 8th	The Guilds AGM Homemade Night		A chance to show what else you can make	Winters Winemakers Lunch To be Finalized	Tues 1 st Zoom 7pm

SENTIA WINE TESTING



The guild has a **Sentia** wine analyser available to members to have wine samples analysed for **FreeSO2** and **Malic Acid**.

The tests can be carried out prior to guild meetings, starting at 7pm. If you wish to have your wine analysed, please ensure you arrive early and advise Kevin Murphy that you require your wine analysed.

Samples should be kept away from air (ie in a sealed bottle, or sample vial with minimum air space). Only a very small sample is required for the tests.

Costs are: Members - Free SO2 \$6.00 and **Malic Acid** \$15.00 Non-members - \$10 and \$20
FAWG Calendar



Cordon Corner

By Mike Payne



March, (or even late Feb), is a busy time for all, be it a grower, a winemaker or both. For most growers, March is a time for grape testing, harvest date estimation, grape picking, organising grape orders for customers and transporting fruit to the winemakers.

For the hobby winemaker it is just as busy. Sometimes it's picking your own grapes, picking elsewhere to get the fruit you want, or just arranging the hectic schedule to pick up from a supplier.

If you are growing your own grapes and you are not sure if your testing regime and projected picking date is correct, don't hesitate to contact a nearby vineyard, be it a hobbyist or commercial operation. I have found most to be very helpful and forthcoming with advice.

Finally, don't forget to record all of the dates, readings and comments, as over the coming seasons this may well become valuable data and guidance for future actions.

To get us in the mood for Glen's Maltese chat: Maltese Wine: A Guide to its History, Terroir, and Varietals



Updated on January 30, 2023 Welcome Center Malta

Everyday at 16:00 in Malta, a cannon is fired over the ships lining the island's Grand Harbour. When you hear it, you know that evening has arrived.

It is also a signal that it might be a good time to open a bottle of Maltese wine.

Living in Malta has many advantages. For the wine lover, the ability to taste wines that are rarely found anywhere else on Earth is certainly one of them.

Whether you're swirling a glass of golden gírgentina, or sipping a ġellewża as red as Maltese strawberries, wine is one of the many rewards of moving to Malta.

History of Maltese Wine

Malta has an incredibly rich and diverse wine history dating back possibly 6,000 years. With a variety of rulers and inhabitants over the millennia, the islands have a unique outlook on wine.

Early History

One of the earliest traces of human settlement and possible wine consumption on Malta is a mysterious and ancient civilization known as "The Temple Builders."

These masonry-minded people were busy carving temples out of the islands' limestone around 4,000 BCE. The temples often had two holes carved into the floor of the entrance that may have been used to collect a ceremonial beverage — possibly even wine.

However, it was the seafaring Phoenicians that launched the history of Maltese wine around 700 BCE. Positioned at the center of the Mediterranean, Malta was a natural

logistics hub for the Phoenicians and would have needed a population of permanent settlers. With a long-established history of wine production, the Phoenicians on Malta would probably have planted grape vines.

The Romans

The Roman Republic gained control of Malta and its wine production after defeating the Phoenician state of Carthage in the first Punic War. Rome valued wine as a strategic resource that could be substituted for fresh water. With Malta's warm and dry Mediterranean climate, Romans could drink a diluted wine to help conserve water during the summer.

Evidence of wine's central role in Roman life on Malta can be found at the Roman Villa museum near Mdina. Here you can find clay amphora used for shipping and storing wine around the Mediterranean.

The Arabs

Following the collapse of the Roman Empire and the arrival of the Arabs in 870 CE, wine production shriveled. Only grapes that could be eaten survived this period. As a result, only two types of indigenous grapes remain on Malta: girgentina and ġellewża.

The Knights of Saint John and Beyond

The Knights of Saint John did little to resuscitate wine-making in Malta following their arrival on the islands in 1530 CE. They declared the two local grapes to be good for eating only. Together with the Renaissance underway and more vines being cultivated around Europe, it became easier to import high-quality wine from around the Mediterranean than to develop local varietals.

It wasn't until the early 21st century that quality began to improve significantly in domestic wine production. Malta's joining of the European Union in 2004 opened the country's wine industry up to intense international competition, forcing winemakers to improve their quality.

Today, Malta has less than 2,000 acres of land being cultivated for wine. Yet, despite the country's small production, some of its most prominent wine-makers are beginning to win gold medals in international competitions. Invariably, their success has something to do with the islands' climate and soil.

Malta's Terroir

Malta enjoys about 300 days of sunshine each year. While the country is politically united with Europe, it geologically belongs to the African continent. As a result, it is influenced by the hot and dry air masses that hover over the Sahara Desert and occasionally coat Malta in a thin layer of fine, orange sand.

Water Shortages

This Saharan influence means that water is in short supply on Malta and forces winemakers to carefully conserve.

"We use drip irrigation from rain water that we collect in winter," says Joseph Spiteri of Ta' Mena Estate on the island of Gozo. The controlled watering, together with the dry heat, lowers the chance of fungus attacking the vines.

Minimal rain also enhances what is known as the "island effect." Since Malta's wineries are coastal, they receive strong seabreezes, which create a light salt crust on the grapes.

"We find traces of salt in our wines when we do analysis," says Joseph. This gives Maltese wines a hint of the Mediterranean in each glass.

Calcium Rich and Porous Soil

The soil of the Maltese islands is a product of its limestone geology. Millions of years ago, Malta was submerged underneath the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, layers and layers of

fossilized sea life began to accumulate, creating Malta's unique sedimentary rock foundation.

When the African tectonic plate crashed into Europe, the rock was pushed out of the water to form the Maltese islands. Once exposed to the air, the limestone rock began to erode, creating a soil rich in calcium carbonate.

This limestone soil is ideal for winegrowing since it allows for easy drainage during heavy rainfall. As a result, the wine grapes are kept at an ideal level of stress to concentrate their sugars.

Varietals

Malta's indigenous varietals consist of two types of grapes: girgentina and ġellewża. Each grape has its own unique characteristics and flavors.

Girgentina

Girgentina is Malta's signature white wine. This green grape is grown in bushes close to the ground to protect it from the intense sun and wind.

Native to Malta, girgentina is often blended with other white varietals grown on the island including chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, or vermentino — a grape widely planted on the nearby Italian island of Sardinia. Delicata Winery, one of Malta's largest wine producers, also makes a semi-sparkling wine called Girgentina Frizzante which invariably sells-out on New Year's Eve.

With flavors reminiscent of the island's citrus, prickly pear, and honey, girgentina pairs well with crisp salads, vanilla ice cream, and freshly-caught seafood from the coastal village of Marsaxlokk.

Ġellewża

Ġellewża is Malta's indigenous red grape and is ideally suited to the islands' hot and dry climate. On its own, the grape is usually pressed into refreshingly fruity rosés. However, when blended with a darker syrah or cabernet sauvignon, ġellewża can easily be sipped on cooler Mediterranean evenings and paired with rich, meat dishes.

How each Maltese winemaker chooses to approach ġellewża will produce a decidedly different bottle of wine. Each glass may possess hints of delicate forest berries, or it may take on an essence of dark caramel from the island's carob trees — originally cultivated by the Arabs over 1,000 years ago.

Wine Tasting in Malta

Tasting Maltese wine is a key advantage of living on the islands. With so little land under cultivation, most of the wine is consumed domestically.

Wine Bars and Restaurants

There are several wine bars in Malta that you can find a bottle of local red, white, or rosé. If you're also in search of local cuisine, look for a menu with Malta's prized rabbit stew or a selection of cheese-filled pastries called pastizzi. A good restaurant featuring local delicacies should also have a wine list featuring a few Maltese varietals.

Tasting Rooms

Many wineries also have tasting rooms where you can compare their different offerings side-by-side. Having a dedicated staff to share the story of each wine is a distinct advantage if you're looking to delve deep into the gold or ruby treasure swirling in your glass.

My Vintage Year:

An interview series: Where we interview wine people. They may be your fellow guild members or significant others in the Wine Industry. Was this their vintage year: by Dave Chambers

Today it is Andrew Hickinbotham.



We all know Andrew is a fine Wine Maker. He and his wife Terryn are a formidable team, both in the Vineyard and their restaurant. But you may not be surprised to know there is more to Andrew than is obvious at first blush.

He is an engaging conversationalist and can get excited about most topics. We both waxed lyrical about the local vines that do so well on the Mornington Peninsula including those varieties that feature on his own property. Then the topic of Rutherglen stickies was raised. Before you could say Pinot Noir a bottle of Muscat appeared. To comment that it was luscious, viscous and had a green meniscus finishing like liquid Christmas Cake, doesn't fully describe the experience of that liquid gold on your tongue. And no Andrew didn't make it. You see he is held in such high regard by his friends that gifts like these keep on coming. After you have read his story you may understand why this is so.
Cheers Dave

Dave: Why wine and not beer.

Andrew: In fact we make both, however "It takes a lot of beer to make great wine"

Dave: How did Wine Making as a career unfold. Has this been an easy path for you?

Andrew: My older brother was the family winemaker until he died in a plane crash in 1986. It was then incumbent upon me to take up the reins.

Dave: What is your first experience that you remember that led to an interest in wine.



Andrew: My interest was in fact vineyards. Great wine is always made in the vineyard and we strive to grow the best grapes possible.

Dave: Did that immediately lead to your career in making wine.

Andrew: Initially I planted vineyards for rich Melbourne businessmen who needed a tax right-off. Thereafter they asked me to make the wine from the grapes, which I enjoyed doing and began developing different techniques to overcome the enormous up-front costs of establishing a winery.

Dave: What is an interesting unknown fact about you that members of our Frankston Guild may or may not find interesting.

Andrew: I met my partner Terryn at university and we have been partners in life and business ever since – 44 years.

Dave: If money was no object what wine or beverage are you buying with these unlimited funds.

Andrew: I visited an New Zealand winemaker at Chateau Petrus in 1983. He was on work experience and we tasted some of the wine.
I would be drinking Chateau Petrus and eating unpasteurised cheese until I exploded

Our Editor Jodi would like to ask:

Jodi: If you could only grow one variety of grape, what would it be and why?

Andrew: That's a no brainer - Pinot Noir. So versatile and yet seductive and elusive. When we first came to the Peninsula 44 years ago people wanted us to plant Shiraz and Cabernet. We thought this futile as these varieties grew better in warmer climates. So, we asked the CSIRO, and I still remember the day when Allan Antcliff and Peter Clingellefer from CSIRO Merbein arrived. They got out of their car and said "This would be good country for growing Pinot and Chardonnay". The rest is history.

Dave: What are you making now or have recently that you are most proud.

Andrew: Our 2024 Pinot noir is the best wine I have made. I look forward to the 2025 vintage!

Dave: Does technical astuteness give you an edge in your wine making skills. Wine making is skill that unfolds with experience. Are you finding this to be true for you in your own wine making?

Andrew: Winemaking is a science. It is just as important to understand the science as it is to have the experience. Science has a logic that defies imagination.

Dave: Are you into the intellectual part of the discussion about wine. Wine can be so many things to so many people. But what does it bring to you?

Andrew: A pursuit of excellence that is beyond belief. A satisfaction that we have created something beautiful and that will be enjoyed by so many people.

Dave: Are you a pedantic fussy wine maker or do you prefer to feel your way along steady as she goes. It will work out in the end.

Andrew: I try to be pedantic, but life has a way of putting up hurdles and it's how you handle those hurdles that defines you. The rewards always out way the path you took to get there.

Dave: What is wine making to you. I suspect it is not just a job. But a consuming passion that excites you. Is this true.

Andrew: Winemaking is a way of life that very few people get to experience. It has many hurdles and pitfalls, but the enjoyment of opening a delicious bottle of wine out ways most obstacles. I'm definitely not selfish. I enjoy drinking all brands, styles and varieties of wine.

Dave: What are you excited about for the future of wine making. Markets are changing with China causing so much heartache. How do you see it unfolding over the next ten years?

Andrew: Unfortunately younger generations are being told not to drink wine, and they are moving into spirits and other drinks, which is a shame because wine is a natural fermented product and therefore is better for you than spirits. Also, the days of the independent winery are over with large companies owning most of the brands on offer and most of the labels on display.

Dave: What inspires you to make better wine. Is it the accolades, gold medals or the knowledge that you are ever improving on your skill?

Andrew: I always strive for perfection. If accolades follow, they are deserved but making the best wine is the highest achievement.

Dave: Who or what has been your biggest influence in wine making.

Andrew: My father was a huge influence. He held so much stature amongst his peers. I never tried to fill his boots, rather follow my own path with my partner Terryn. Another huge influence was Len Evans. I only met him once, but would have enjoyed more time in his company.

Dave: What were you drinking in your twenties.

Andrew: Beer

Dave: If you could tell the young Andrew about life, what advice would you give.

Andrew: Don't bite off more than you can chew

Dave: Is there a wine that you would like to make for a challenge that you haven't made before.

Andrew: Viognier. It was made by a local winery on the Mornington Peninsula for many years, and it was delicious. Recently they pulled the vines. Had I known I would have snatched them and grown them here.

Dave: Can you enlighten us with a couple of your favourites wine tweaks.

Andrew: I like to add wood chips to a primary ferment. It helps bind the colour and adds a backbone to the wine. I also like cold soaking and post ferment maceration on all reds.

Dave: I have heard some complete disasters, from both commercial and hobby wine makers. What is your biggest disaster you can share with us.

Andrew: You name it!

One that I recall was during the cork taint era. We were having wines returned for having cork taint from restaurants constantly – and we had to replace them. In the end we opened a dozen bottles of the same wine and tasted them together. Not one of them tasted the same. **DISASTER!**

Dave: I have asked this question of everyone and so far, a hundred percent have said making wine was never a financial consideration. I understand you do it for an income commercially, but what was the motivation and still is for you after so many years. Would you have done something other than wine making perhaps.

Andrew: The life style is a big motivation. Not having to answer to a boss is important on the creative side, and I hate how the world is driven by money. There are many of others things in life that are so much more important than money!

And Finally

Dave: You are going to a desert island to spend some chill time. You are taking with you one piece of music, one bottle of wine, a book and food. To be clear, that is a choice of one bottle of wine, one meal and so on. What will be placed in your suitcase.

Andrew: CD: Adventures in Paradise by Alex Burns'

Book: Australian Plonky by Ian Hickinbotham

Wine: Chateau Petrus

Food: Southern European soft cheese



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