

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