

My Vintage Year

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 Joe Dimasi. Joe is both a passionate person and a passionate wine maker. He is a big supporter of the Frankston Wine Guild. He and his wife Angie are in equal measure great social



people. It is no surprise they have both supported the Wine Makers Lunch from the outset. The concept was grasped by them immediately, a mix of shared experience of social engagement and great wine and brilliant food provided by us, your own members. I like Joe and Angie, they are easy and very friendly people to engage with. Joe has a very interesting story to tell, and I hope to learn more from him. You will too by joining us at Kevin Murphy's place for the next Wine Makers Lunch. Some of our Eltham friends have decided to share our experience at Kevin's, spaces are closing fast, so get in quick, as they say in the classics. Thanks, Joe, for taking the time to share with us your Wine Making journey, an inspiring tale from a skilled Wine Maker and a lovely bloke. Your father would be proud of you.

Dave: Why wine and not beer.

Joe: No particular reason, I grew up with wine all my life

Dave: How did Wine Making as a hobby unfold. Has this been an easy path for you. What came first the Wine Guild or Wine Making.

Joe: Wine making; I was born in Calabria, Southern Italy and like most Italians, as a little boy, I remember my family's vineyard and the joyous times at harvest time when everyone sang Italian folk songs as the grapes were picked and loaded into large wooden vats onto bullock-driven carts and driven into the village and crushed in a purpose-built enclave shared by all the villagers. Once crushed, the free running must was carried in buckets to the waiting wooden barrels, then pressed and also added into the buckets and carried to the



respective homes. There was no science to the process and the wine was generally drunk as needed, with no thought to the ullage left in the barrel as the wine was consumed before any spoilage occurred. This process was carried on when we arrived in Australia, in my family's case, when we arrived in 1956, one of our family friends who resided in Gore St Fitzroy provided the "Permento" a copy of the vat back home in Italy made of concrete-lined bricks complete with a

draining pit. One of the family friends owned a Bedford truck he used to transport the fruit and vegetables from the Queen Victoria market to his fruit shop in Gertrude St. He provided his truck to carry the participating men to Shepparton where they picked the grapes at one of our fellow "paesani" (family friend's) farm

When I was about six years old, in that winemaking enclave back in the village, after the men had crushed the grapes, they milled around outside smoking and chatting before heading home for lunch, my friend and I wandered into the room when my attention turned to the large crusher wheel located above the vat. I climbed onto the loading platform and grabbed the handle of the wheel and began spinning the wrought iron wheel. As the heavy wheel gained momentum, the grape trough now empty, I eventually decided to stop playing, but the wheel was still spinning, when the handle grabbed me from the pit of my stomach, carrying me up and over, dumping me into the must. The fermenting fumes of the grapes filled my nostrils and left me with an exploding head. Luckily my friend raised the alarm and I was rescued.

True story!

The wine came before the Guild.



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

Joe: After many years of helping my father to make wine and experiencing the hit-and-miss of the vintages, I lost interest when I married in 1970. In 1972, I opened a Panel beating business across the road from a Greek family-owned Panel shop and we became friends. In 1979, one of the brothers who knew that I had an interest in wine making, asked me if I wanted to join his family and other family friends of theirs to make wine together. A fellow Greek friend of theirs was a grape grower in Berri, South Australia who would supply the Shiraz grapes. The idea was to bring our barrels and any equipment we had to his father's place in Clayton. He said that his neighbour, a retired builder had a brother who was a Pharmacist who knew about the chemistry of winemaking. I thought, "Why not?" and so I agreed. The grapes arrived, I had my father's barrel, and hand-driven crusher and transported my equipment to the address. All the others did the same but I was the only one who had a crusher. As it transpired, the big secret to making wine was the use of sulphur according to the "expert" Pharmacist; There was no suggestion of dosage to the volume of wine, just add sulphur. So all the barrels were parked next to each other in my friend's father's garage and sat there for some months until one day my friend came over

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to suggest to come and bottle the wine because it was evaporating.

It was evaporating because the old man was going from barrel to barrel, helping himself fill jugs at a time as he needed it for his own consumption.

For the record, it was the best wine I had ever been involved in making to that time, probably because of the addition of the sulphur. No wonder the old man loved it. But that vintage was the inspiration to recommence

making wine until 2007 when I'd heard about Graham Morris who ran winemaking short courses which I attended and progressed from there until my wife Angie and I joined the Guild where we met so many wonderful like-minded knowledgeable people including David Hart who has been an inspiration to me and who's advices I still seek from time to time.



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

Joe: As a kid, I was good at drawing, so when I finished school at Richmond Tech. I tried to find a cadetship in commercial art, but unfortunately, I didn't have the right academic qualification, so, as a compromise, the employment officer at the local CES (Commonwealth Employment Service) persuaded me to take up an apprenticeship in Automotive Spray painting. He rationalised it with the words; "Art, Paint, SPRAY PAINT, What do you think? My parents couldn't afford to keep me at school for another year or two, so I accepted the job. But, I became quite good at Spray painting and went on to run my own Panel shops, worked as an Insurance assessor, educated my three daughters from my first marriage and had enough modest wealth to be happy and the freedom to enjoy sports; Aussie rules football, to Squash and now, Golf. I'm content now, being married to Angie for the last 30 years.

Dave: If money was no object. What wine or beverage fantasy purchase would you make with unlimited funds.

Joe: That's a hard question, I'm a man of modest tastes. I like nothing better than a glass or two of Robert Oatley, Pepperjack, My own wine, and the odd tippie of Scotch Whiskey

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

Joe: Shiraz lovingly crafted from Shiraz grapes delivered to my door from Heathcote. My wife Angie makes Limoncello and Orangecello from the trees out the back.

Glen Fortune has a Presidents Question for you:

Question: Joe do you make wine better than your father did and do you think this was influenced by the FAWG and your participation with the guild.

Joe: Absolutely! As I mentioned earlier in the interview, my father's generation didn't have a clue regarding the science of winemaking and it was left to the lap of the gods as to how the wine turned out, hence I stopped making it once he passed away. The FAWG participation definitely enhanced my wine-making skills.

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 wine making.

Joe: Yes, over the years, I picked up a limited amount of technical knowledge which definitely is an advantage, but apart from the short course I completed with Graham Morris, I gleaned a lot from my fellow FAWG members including David Hart

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.

Joe: No, I'm not into the intellectual part about wine, I don't possess the nous nor the education. There are so many complex things that can be learned about wine, so I'm quite happy to listen to other learned people talk about it. I just want to know enough to create a nice, drinkable wine that I can enjoy and proudly sharing with family and friends.

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.

Joe: Yes, I try to do the basics well that I have learned over the years.

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

Joe: I am so happy that I'm retired and able to spend the time it takes to monitor and make the necessary adjustments from crushing to the finished wine. In the old days, I didn't have a clue on what to do if something went wrong. Now at least I have some idea, with some help from my friends of course.



Dave: What are you excited about for the future of home wine making. Where do you see it unfolding over the next ten years.

Joe: You know, with rising cost of alcohol, I wouldn't be surprised if more and more people take up the hobby, not just with wine, but other beverages too.

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

Joe: Medals are nice, but personal improvement is front of mind.

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

Joe: My heritage first and foremost and what I learned along the way and meeting like-minded people at the FAWG. I'm inspired by other people who are well set up and their knowledge. One never stops learning and that's what keeps it so interesting.

Dave: Can you describe where you make your wine. Is it in your kitchen or do you have a dedicated area for wine making

Joe: I live on rising block of land, I guess you would call it the old quarter acre so the house is raised at the front with a garage underneath and a spiral staircase to the front door and a balcony. When I purchased the place in 1993, I created a doorway leading to the house stumps where a retaining brick wall was erected and that is now the "Cellar". About that time, the RACV, where Angie and I had worked was closing all their branches, so we took advantage and picked up some of the cabinetry and display pigeonholes to store the bottles of wine. The crushing and pressing is done in the garage, then pumped into a 500lt tank in the cellar. It's modest, but it's mine/ours (oops)

Dave: What have been the positive surprises of your membership of FAWG.

Joe: Meeting so many lunatics like myself. We have had some fun, especially working together at Wine Showtimes.

Dave: What were you drinking in your twenties.

Joe: Plenty of wine, plenty of beer

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

Joe: Look, Listen, Learn, Don't assume, love and respect others, enjoy a drink in moderation, and mix with people smarter than you.

Dave: What wine do you particularly enjoy making. Has the Guild turned out to be an ideal group either socially or for ideas for wine making.

Joe: Mainly Shiraz, Cab sav or any red. I would love to try Pino- red or white and yes, the FAWG group is an ideal organization to be a part of.

Dave: Enlighten us with a couple of your favourite wine tweaks.

Joe: The only thing I have done last few years, is to leave the wine on the lees in the tank longer until almost bottling time, usually the following vintage. I add Oak cubes after pressing and once into the tank.

Dave: I have heard in my short time with the guild some complete disasters while making wine. What is your biggest disaster you can share with us.

Joe: Running out of wine before the new vintage is ready. Oh! I did experience “Stuck” fermentation once, so now I wrap an electric blanket under a doona. The electric bill is through the roof though.

Dave: I have asked this question of everyone. So far, a hundred percent have said making wine was never a financial consideration. What was the motivation and still is for you after so many years.

Joe: It's never been a financial consideration and I don't remember a time including when I was a toddler that I didn't eat without a drink of wine, good or bad.

And Finally:

Dave: You are going to a desert island in the Galapagos Islands 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 and declared to customs at Quito Airport, Ecuador, before you leave for the Galapagos Islands.

Joe: Apart from an album of Roy Orbison's greatest hits, I would pack and declare a bottle of my homemade Shiraz, a crusty Italian bread and a platter of provolone, a tasty assortment of other cheeses and some thin salami, Rino Ballerini's Capocollo and Kalamata olives

