

## My Vintage Year! Karen Coulson

Hi Karen

Firstly, thanks for very kindly for offering to do this.

Have fun with it. It can be as serious as you intend. Can you send back when completed? David Hart will have a Guest Question and I will send it on as soon as I have it. This may appear in the FAWG Newsletter if you have no objections. Can you also attach a couple of photographs please associated with wine making, in your vineyard or such?

Warm Regards, Dave Chambers

**Dave:** Karen did you ever drink anything other than wine in your early years.

**Karen:** I liked still dry cider when I lived in England and couldn't afford good wine.



**Dave:** Have you ever thought that the path you have been on could have been a different outcome. Or to put it another way, what would you have done differently.

**Karen:** The evolution of my career through research chemistry, through winemaking then around to wine chemistry was wonderful but I do wish I'd fitted in architecture as well. If we hadn't bought the property at Yarrambat I'd probably have stayed a wine drinking scientist with an artistic bent but then the architecture interest played out here too.

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

**Karen:** Being introduced to Coonawarra reds when being wined and dined by affluent young men who were trying to impress me in the heady Canberra 70s.

**Dave:** Did this lead to making your way in the Wine World and eventually lead to the hobby of making wine.

**Karen:** No, this started when my non affluent husband (who loved red wine too) and I made fruit and kit wine fermented by the gas fire in gallon jars when we lived in poverty in London. The lead into real winemaking came when we bought the Yarrambat property with a small rundown hobby vineyard on it and I had to learn to do something with it. Many courses and a degree in wine science later the Wine World had me hooked.



**Dave:** What is an interesting unknown fact about you that members of both guilds may find interesting?

**Karen:** I was Miss Barwon Head's beach girl 1969. What a floosy!

**Dave:** Can you tell us about the wildest party you attended. Probably in your youth but maybe not.

**Karen:** It has to be a Monash friend's 21st birthday party on election night 1972. I remember the political hype, the mauve flared pants suit and it was dry!

**Dave:** What are you making now?

**Karen:** The Pink Bastard, a rose made from my U3A wine appreciation friends' backyard grapes (plus purchased Pinot Noir from Shaws Road this year). The unknown grape provenance and help with pressing and bottling by the gang lead to its name and the pride we all have in it. Back to hobby scale (130L) is more difficult than commercial scale!

David Hart has a Guest Question for you.

**David Hart:** Karen we know you are very good at White Wine maker. Have you ever had an interesting Red Wine experience while travelling around with your Airbag Press?

**Karen:** I usually loved pressing reds in my airbag press, great smells, no grape stickiness, 2 tonnes plus in each batch, skins like paper at the end. This was a Shiraz press near Geelong. The Shiraz had been on skins about 3 weeks and was totally dry. We must pumped it into the axial feed of the press with lots of lifting of the skins in the open fermenter. The advantage of this is you fill the press quickly as it drains while you're filling. This time the skins were so disintegrated that they blocked the slots in the stainless steel drum and even with rotation of the drum we were being showered with red wine (very good red wine, what a waste!) throughout the fill and press cycle. Anyone could see I'd pressed red wine that day. It wouldn't have happened with Cabernet Sauvignon or Pinot Noir but soft skinned Shiraz was a challenge. Great yield in the end.



**Dave:** You have educated yourself with regards to your career in wine. Where did you pick up your wine making skills?

**Karen:** I didn't pick up the skills – Charles Sturt's sound education (B App Sc (Wine Science)) and years of experience with my and clients' wines taught me a thing or two about winemaking. Teaching wine chemistry taught me even more.

**Dave:** This is probably a silly question given the technical interest you have in wine. Are you in to 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.

**Karen:** I love the whole experience of drinking good wine. I rarely drank my own wines, preferring to drink better and now I spend a lot of money on fine wine and nearly as much on fine food to match it. I don't even share the exceptional bottle – I'll savour it over 2 nights so over indulgence doesn't spoil the ecstasy. I do like to philosophize about the happy balance of art and science in winemaking.

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

**Karen:** I follow the guidelines (not rules) but think a good winemaker should read the grapes by tasting and smelling and be experimental if experience suggests you can make a more interesting wine by a little deviance.

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

**Karen:** These days it's not the winemaking but the quality of drinking that I'm passionate about. I'm still in awe of the top winemakers who add a touch of magic to the grape product.

**Dave:** What are you excited about for the future of amateur home wine making.

**Karen:** The quality improvement in the wines submitted to the wine shows is remarkable. What particularly impresses me is the improvement in traditional (European) wine styles as younger generations apply some understanding to the wines their grandfathers made, often with faults, earlier.

**Dave:** What inspires you to make better wine? Have you ever entered the Eltham Wine Show? Is it the Gold medals or the knowledge that you are ever improving on your skills.

**Karen:** Experience and understanding count for heaps. I have 2 (I think) best of show awards from the Eltham Wine Show but I expect better of my winemaking each year. Perhaps not now that I am back to hobby scale, my sophisticated equipment and good purchased grapes certainly helped when I was commercial.

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

**Karen:** Winemakers like David Lance, Clare Halloran, Kathleen Quealy, Steve Morris and CSU lecturers were great mentors.

**Dave:** I think you are a Life Member of the EDWG. How long have you been a member of EDWG?

**Karen:** I think I joined EDWG in about 1987 after meeting 2 members at a short course in winemaking run by a TAFE. The course was pretty terrible but I learned heaps from my new friends.

**Dave:** What have been the positive surprises of your membership of EDWG?

**Karen:** The shared experience of the old timers and the enthusiasm of the youngsters (under 40s).

**Dave:** What were you drinking in your twenties?

**Karen:** Outside of dining in restaurants like The Lobby in Canberra or Leondas in Melbourne it was flagon red.

**Dave:** If you could tell the young Karen about life, what advice would you give!

**Karen:** Be experimental, take a few risks, especially in wine drinking.

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

**Karen:** Acid and tannin trials. It's amazing what 0.5g/L tartaric acid or 0.1g/L grape seed tannin can do to make a good wine better (or worse, that's why you trial).

**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?

**Karen:** In my own cellar it was ignoring a full 200L SS drum of Riesling. It was full and had its regular dose of SO<sub>2</sub> and I forgot it. Next check near bottling it was aldehydic and I couldn't get it back. I turned some of it into a mediocre fino (sherry that we can't say anymore).

**Dave:** I suspect I know the answer to this question however is making wine ever a financial consideration for you.

**Karen:** My husband used to say he worked to support my folly. Hills of Plenty was always only a token expression of my winemaking though the press service paid for the air bag press purchase easily and the hospitality of clients made the provision of service a pleasure above what I charged for consultancy. I was a hopeless salesperson and gave away as much Hills of Plenty wine as I sold.

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?

**Karen:** The music would have to be an album by Leonard Cohen. The bottle of wine a Burgundy grand cru from Nuits St George, with mushrooms, truffles, olives and tomatoes on sourdough. Can I have duck pate as well? And the book? Oscar and Lucinda by Peter Carey. All together? May be overload of the senses!!

## BULK GRAPE ORDER FOR 2021

And last but not least is some info for next years bulk grape purchase by the guild.

At this stage Mike Payne will have Pinot available, as for our supply at Heathcote of Shiraz, CabSav and Merlot, Glen is awaiting news that they have leased the Vineyard out and that our details have been relayed to the new managers who will be in touch. Another supply has come to the fore via Pierre, Kevin and Zenon, from Shepparton, Glen has been in contact and he is very keen. From all accounts the fruit has been good in the past so stay tuned.

The question asked by both growers was the volume.

So Peeps we need to know who would like to purchase and what amount/ variety, lets work off the usual foam boxes which hold about 16kg producing 9lts. Then we can negotiate the price, whether we have delivered/ pay for boxes/ and anything else, So text through your details to Glens Mobile.. Your name/how many boxes of which variety.

Cheers

Glens mobile is 0488 331 001. This is to get an idea of volume so we can give the suppliers an idea.

