

Say What! An Occasional Short Story

Interview with David Hart by Dave Chambers

Sure David says, come on down, we start bottling at 8.30 on Monday. I will be there, but gee it's an hour and twenty from my place. It's an early start but I wouldn't pass up the opportunity to get a bottling masterclass from someone who I consider is the guru of wine making, well, my guru anyway. And that's not taking away any of the advice I have received from many other people. I am humbled and forever grateful, whoever you are. So thank you.

It's an easy drive to David Hart's place in Bittern and the traffic is light. Google maps always makes a mess of the last kilometre or so, it's not really sure where he lives. I expect David enjoys this anomaly and relative anonymity from Google.

We sit, we talk, over a cup of tea before we start. Like me, David does not need an excuse to have a cup of tea. It's his thinking time, his time to ponder, a time to reset. A time to share some thoughts about wine making and life according to his high expectations. He is, as you know, considered and careful before speaking always. Searching for the right word or phrase to accurately reflect his thoughts, he shares the following.

There are several enjoyable parts of Wine Making some more satisfying than others, he says with authority. There is always the hard work of pruning. The anticipation also, as this is the first step towards the next vintage. This may involve walking through the vineyard in Spring time. The birds, bees and wild life are in abundance, the sun still low in the sky. I take the family dog. We weave through the vines watching the bees ever busy on the flowers. The dog follows. It's a kind of therapy and meditation for me. I always find this has a calming effect on me, I come away feeling quite relaxed and in a nice space from the experience.

Quite quickly, it seems, comes the thrill of the harvest. All your efforts come down to coalesce at this point. Did you prune to the right buds, were the days filled with enough sunshine, did we have excess rain. The excitement is building. This is where your work in the vineyard leads to that full ripe fruit.

There is a satisfaction knowing that the hanging fruit has captured the characters, the beautiful flavours, the bouquets that ultimately will reward all the senses after some bottle development.

In many ways Wine Making is a bit of an anti climax. It's a process that nevertheless has to be skilled and efficient to extract those subtle flavours, colours and character from full ripe berries. It's enjoyable work, it has to be thorough and exacting but soon it's over and you can be more relaxed with the result.

Sure you can tinker with the wine a little, but in the end it all comes down to this moment. And for me it's most enjoyable part, sharing the wine with friends and discussing the techniques of wine making as applied to the current vintage and its ultimate success filling the glass.

This is the reward for those times early on in the vineyard when the days are cold, windy and wet with Winter yet to release the vineyard from her icy grasp. The warmth of Spring and Summer seem far away at this moment. It all comes down to this, lying here in my glass, this is my reward for all that effort. Typically it displays the uniqueness of my cool climate with a longer growing season, hot Summers and cool nights. We have what I call the Western Port Doctor a little like Bordeaux, or indeed Margaret River. This is where about 3pm a nice cool sea breeze invades the vineyard. The sea breeze manufactured only about one kilometre away on the sea surface, has an effect of cooling the vines from the heat of the day. My soil is at first blush unremarkable, but being clay, it has the effect of holding up the water. Which means I don't have to irrigate as much after rain.

Wine making is a bit of a roller coaster you can't always be sure of what you are getting emotionally. There are highs and equally low periods you need to negotiate throughout the year and growing season. But this is what I love about it.

David Hart has a love of all the facets associated with Wine Making. He is very good at it. Do you wonder why he gets so many Gold Medals. He is not concerned with this accolade. He sees it more for what it is. A reward for effort and acknowledgement of his skill. He is more concerned with improving his skills with every vintage. If a few Gold Medals come his way, we'll that is good.

But he is just as happy sharing all this knowledge with as many people as he can on how he achieved this.