

## 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 Kevin Murphy.**

Kevin Murphy has been a consistent contributor of value to the Frankston Wine guild. He is an expressive individual, of talent and wit. We are lucky to have his endless support and advice. And yet he is grateful to the members of the guild for their assistance in his journey. I do like his idea of taking an 'Apprentice.' Everyone takes a different path to their first wine experience; this is Kevin's story of the journey. I find it very interesting, as I do all the stories of Wine Makers in this guild. In a way it is quite a typical story; find a group of wine makers, do the course, make wine, and have fun with new friends.

Maybe you know someone who would benefit from this insight also, bring them along to the next meeting of the guild. I hope also, after reading this you may want to tell your story. I am happy to hear it. Just contact me and I will set up an Interview.

As he indicated before sending his typed interview, he likes to talk. Yeah, we know that Kevin. But it is another thing to know what to talk about, listen carefully he knows his stuff. I have enjoyed a few occasions now of wine and spirit chatter with Kevin and he is always interesting and knowledgeable. He is a very good wine maker, and we may find a few tricks within his answers to my many questions.

And could I add here that I was sorry to

hear that Glen had to exclude himself from the Wine Show with Covid. When you think that the volume of work contributed by him as our President leading up to the Wineshow, that is a shame. He would have been very disappointed. I hope it is not around you for long mate.

**Dave: Why wine and not beer.**

Kevin: My father taught me how to make beer at an early age. The garage was always full of plastic barrels and smelled of hops. He, as an industrial chemist, produced beers that were excellent but were around 8% alcohol, so it didn't take many before the family, and half the hangers-on from the neighborhood, would be standing around the piano singing "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling". Many years later I did take up the hobby, but since I preferred drinking wine, I only made a few batches of beer.

**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.**

Kevin: I was invited by a friend to the FAWG wine show, which I loved attending. It was at my third show that I signed up for the Wine-making course. I highly recommend doing the course. Peter Enness and David Wood were the teachers. It was fun, informative, and I walked away with my first batch of Raspberry Wine. I named it Fluffy because it sat on the kitchen bench making noises for several weeks. I was busting to get started at making wine with grapes, so I went out and bought seven 230 litre 2<sup>nd</sup> hand barrels, as well as all the necessary instruments and fermentation vats and chemicals.

Peter and David encouraged me to speak to Pierre Rault with a view to becoming his assistant. He had a crook back at the time but had the knowledge. So, I became the muscles, and he was the chemist and manager. It was a great partnership, and still is. We both help each other





at our respective garages, along with Richard Sanderson, a new member of the club. We're a good team.

The first batch Pierre and I made together was Chambourcin. We messed it up and learned every trick in the book of how to repair it. A bronze medal was the result. I even have a picture of Peter Ferguson of Fergusons Winery in the Yarra Valley. He is holding up our bottle! Wow. It was a good endorsement, as he is the liquor buyer for IGA.

**Dave:** What is your first experience that you remember that led to an interest in wine and did that immediately lead to your hobby of making wine or cider.

**Kevin:** I was always happy to drink anything from beer to wine to spirits, but it was the camaraderie of the members of FAWG that I was drawn to. I wanted a new sport and making wine with a bunch of friendly fun people was appealing.

David Hart was kind enough to take me under his wing after he heard I bought seven barrels even though I had only just started making my first batch with Pierre. He has been a great mentor over the last few years. He even has a knack of

knowing the next mistake I'm about to make. I was about to rack some wine between barrels, and he encouraged me to buy a valve to prevent the wine syphoning back onto the floor. I immediately went out and bought a valve, and naturally didn't install it. Thought I'd do it after pumping the wine. I got distracted and syphoned about 150litres of Merlot onto the garage floor that day, just like David said I might. Ouch. David just knowingly said, "well, it's good that we can learn from our mistakes", Still hurts though.



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

**Kevin:** I'm learning to play the piano. I sometimes practice by playing my keyboard in the garage to sooth my wine. And annoy the neighbors. I enjoy that too.

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

**Kevin:** I would buy a factory and set up a business selling wines from small producers throughout the country. It would be a place to buy wine, learn about wine, learn about pairing, and have tasting sessions. There would also be a piano in

the corner, where entertainers could put on a show. I could play too when no-one's around.

**Dave Says:** Kevin that would be called Kevin Murphy's, or Dan Murphy's 2.0. Love that idea, do you want a partner?

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

Kevin: I'm proud of a very unusual batch I made this year. Piquette. It's commonly made in France. It's a low alcohol batch made from the recently fermented skins. After pressing off this year's merlot, Pierre and Richard and I threw the skins into a fermentation vat with water, lots of sugar, and yeast. David Hart talks about 'bucket science', meaning that you don't need to be pedantic when making wine. Well, we took that thought to a new level. The result is good. It's a light drink which will be good on a hot summer night. We created about 180 litres for a cost of about 20 kg of sugar, a handful of tartaric acid, and a spoon of yeast.

It was like making a child. Created out of nothing, and the experience was lots of fun.

### **Glen Fortune has a Presidents Question for you:**

**Question:** They say it takes a village to raise a child. How important has FAWG been to you in your development as a winemaker?

Kevin: Many years ago, I read that it takes three things for a person to be happy.

1. Someone (or a group) to love.
2. Something to do.
3. Something to hope for.

At the meetings I see a lot of happy people, because FAWG provides all three for those who participate, no matter their status background or beliefs.

When out in the garage doing any hobby, it can get lonely out there. It's nice to have dozens of friends at FAWG with which to share info, a story, or just a glass.

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

Kevin: The more I learn, the less I know. I find that the instruments make life easier. Some people can taste what a wine needs, whether it be a change of pH, or more tannins etc. I am trying to develop those skills, but I find it difficult, probably because I don't taste enough wines. I find that by using the instruments, I can keep the wine safe, and then I rely on the opinions of others to decide if additives such as oak or tannins are required.

I would love to do some courses, such as WSET2 and 3, and a sommelier course. I don't want to work in a restaurant, but desperately want the knowledge. A lot of the people at FAWG have that knowledge, so you'll often see me hanging around listening to people's conversations at the guild nights. So many golden nuggets are uttered at those meetings, as well as a lot of good jokes.

**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.

Kevin: No. I'm far from being that educated in wine. I'm a listener. People should drink what they like, regardless of others' opinions. My favorite now is a Verdelho I made in 2021. It didn't earn a medal. I think it only got a high commendation. But I love it. One of the things I say to myself with each glass is "I picked those grapes". It's very satisfying regardless of the scorecard.

**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.

Kevin: I'm both fussy and lay back. I try to do it right but make a lot of mistakes along the way. But mistakes are the reason for the still. It allows you to turn mistakes into a nice whisky.



**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.

Kevin: Yes, it's the best sport I've ever taken up. Making the wine is a challenge. You're up against yourself, but you have a bunch of people cheering you on and happy to help (and get a free drink). It's technical, but only as much as you want it to be. It's physical, but not too much. And it's social. I love the atmosphere at FAWG

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

Kevin: I would love to see FAWG grow a lot. I think when people try out this sport, they'll love it. I believe FAWG could become a major in the field of wine education. I can see FAWG owning a building, running seminars, and teaching people how to enjoy this hobby as much as our current members. I would also love to see each member take on an 'apprentice' each year.

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

Kevin: I've not earned a gold medal yet. I still have too much to learn. At this month's meeting Rino spoke about a wine that was "good but not balanced". That is my next goal. Learning how to balance a wine. So, improving is the most important thing, and the occasional medal is the way to know we're moving in the right direction.

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

Kevin: David Hart has been my biggest influencer. Pierre Rault, Peter Ennes and David Wood were great for helping me to get started, and I still ask them questions every month. They have knowledge and are happy to share. David Hart has been a tremendous help. It reminds me of The Sorcerer's Apprentice, when Mickey Mouse

was the apprentice to the Sorcerer, who needed to step out. Mickey was told to just keep an eye on everything. Of course, everything went wrong, resulting in a massive flood etc., and the sorcerer stepped back in to fix it all in the end. I know I can always rely on David to get me out of trouble.

**Dave:** Can you describe where you make your wine. Is it in your kitchen or do you have a dedi-



cated area for wine making.

Kevin: I have a double garage, half of which has been turned into a cool-room. I've installed a sink and workbench, and there is space for seven barrels and a few VC's. I need to clear out my old hobbies, or there won't be enough room for next year's vintage. Having an understanding wife is an advantage, although she only drinks David Hart's wines. Whenever she tastes one of my wines, she says "yes its OK, but it's not a David Hart".

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

Kevin: I was surprised at the level of expertise amongst the members. It turned out that Amateur doesn't mean Average. Some of our members make superb wine.

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

Kevin: I was studying and couldn't afford much, so at a night club I would buy a shot of Southern Comfort, no ice in a brandy balloon. I would just sniff the whisky for the whole night.

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

Kevin: Don't think. Just do. You can always change the direction of a ship that's moving but getting started is the hard part. I tend to overthink and consider what might go wrong. It's a bad habit. It's cost me a lot in lost opportunities over the years. I would also tell young Kevin to buy a small factory for future hobbies, such as winemaking.

**Dave: What wine do you particularly enjoy making.**

Kevin: The reds are challenging, and whites are easier. I make about 3 reds for each white because that's where I learn, but I enjoy knocking out Verdelho, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay. They're easier and can be bottled early. I like that.

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

Kevin: Maybe not so much a tweak, but I found a product to treat mouldy grapes. I had some mouldy Pinot Gris 2 years ago, and by adding that product, it killed the mould, and added some extra flavour. It's a bit like white pepper. The wine goes perfectly with spicy food.

**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.**

Kevin: I mentioned that I lost half a barrel of Merlot by not installing a valve on the pipe. Another mistake I made was placing a 35 litre demijohn on the concrete without its plastic case. It was full of wine. I was so careful, but there must have been a grain of sand underneath. There was an awful cracking noise. I was left holding the neck

and pouting as the Pinot Gris washed over my feet. Rubber mats are the answer.

**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.**

Kevin: I love the challenge. I love the camaraderie, and I love to think that one day that elusive Gold medal may be mine.

### **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.**

Kevin: Many years ago I was at a seminar. The speaker asked "Describe your perfect day". I closed my eyes, and described the deserted sandy beach, the rolling hills, the wine, the food etc. It was heaven. A woman behind me said "That sounds terrible". I said "That's OK. You're not invited". How dare she try to squash my dream?

Now, 35 years later, I fully understand that woman. The thought of staying on a desert island is now more of a nightmare to me, than a dream.

If I was forced to be alone, I would use the time to write a book, and play piano. Maybe even try to write a musical. I'm not much of a traveller. Hmmm Beef Wellington would be nice though.

