

## 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 Chris Myers.

It should be encouraging to new members after reading Chris Myers' interview how much being a member of Frankston Guild can contribute to your wine making knowledge and skill. I'm sure all of you know his commitment and success in wine making, but it is interesting how his journey has unfolded. Chris is a man of many facets, I found his story very interesting I hope you will also.



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

Chris: Like most people I started out making alcoholic beverages such as ginger beer, cider and ales. As my palate developed I wanted something more challenging than fizzy drinks, so started to experiment with wines particularly country wines as I could see the endless possibilities of trying different ingredients and styles of wine all year round.

#### 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.

Chris: I was a leader of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Frankston Sea Scout Troop and there I met Angus Harding also

a leader, (Colin's uncle) and on a hike to Wilson's Promontory the conversation got around to wines. I was bemoaning the price of decent wine and Angus informed me that he had just joined FAWG and that maybe I should try making my own wine and he would introduce me to the Guild. This he did, so it was the Wine Guild that came first and the wine making took off from there. This was in 1980.

As far as whether it was an easy path or not, I would have to say yes. My whole working life has been in the creative arts and winemaking is just an extension of that creativity.

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

Chris: My parents were not interested in wine, but my grandfather was. My grandparents lived in an old stone cottage in Wiltshire which had a cider orchard attached to it and a dairy where my grandfather would make his wines. These were in the English tradition – fruits and flowers gathered from the hedgerows – and up to the time of coming to Australia, it was my joy to help him.

#### Dave: Did that immediately lead to the hobby of making wine.

Chris: It was most certainly an influence.

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

Chris: My work is represented in most of the major ceramic collections in Australia including The National Gallery of Victoria.

#### Dave: If money was no object what wine or beverage would you buy with these unlimited funds.

Chris: I'm glad you said money was no object because the wines I like are certainly not the cheapest. I do love the sticky end of wines available – vintage ports, liqueur muscats, top end sherries and tokays. I would also buy some of the more interesting wines from around the world. I have always brought back from my travels wines that I could not get in Australia. Except the bottle of mezcal that I bought in Mexico which was smashed by a clumsy porter in San Francisco all over my luggage. The only bottle I have ever lost in my travels.

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

Chris: I am making very little wine at the moment. My winemaking relied mostly on fruits and other ingredients that my friends very kindly supplied. The incentive was that I always gave them back 10% of the wine made, but with COVID this supply network ceased to exist.

**Peter Enness has a Guest Question for you:**

Question: What is the most difficult Country wine to get right?

Chris: I would have to consult my records for this. Fortunately most of my wines turned out to be quite drinkable, but one a white elderberry was awful. I never could get this wine right, and yet some of my most successful wines have been ordinary elderberries.

Dave: Where did you pick up your wine making skills. Or have you educated yourself to making wine.

Chris: When I joined the Guild there were no winemaking classes available as there are today. Members of the Guild would go out of their way to answer questions, but most of my initial skills were picked up from reading. The books available were mostly English and many of them would lead you astray if they could. I soon learnt however to pick the eyes out of the information and the rest was through experimentation.

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.

Chris: I think that there is a place for the scientific testing of wines, but that is not for me. I went through a stage of testing everything and I don't think my wines improved one little bit. I believe that you must have a feeling for what you are trying to achieve. I trust on my instincts of taste and smell to adjust my wines. I know winemakers who go solely on scientific testing and their wines are perfect but have no life.

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.

Chris: Fussy in cleanliness, sloppy with everything else. It usually turns out all right and

you can enjoy yourself. There is no point to it otherwise.

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.

Chris: When I was lecturing in the Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University, ceramic design was my field and pottery my profession, not my hobby, as some people thought. So, winemaking became my hobby, and consuming passions have everything to do with it.

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

Chris: When I first started judging wines it would be 200 country wines and no more than half a dozen grape wines. This has now completely reversed. It is not necessarily a bad thing, as it has had the effect of increasing Guild members and the number of guest speakers from the industry. I do miss however the intimate discussions over a few bottles of very diverse country wines in a small group. I feel that the guild has lost a certain amount of creativity and diversity and is only heading in one direction. This I can see will only continue. The English tradition is slowly dying – even in England.

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

Chris: It is always very pleasant to be awarded gold medals. It makes you feel that you are heading in the right direction, but improvement should always be the goal. If you feel that you know everything about winemaking, give it away and take up something else. I am still searching.

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

Chris: Two people have influenced me the most. They are Robert Hicks and Maurice Hayes. These were my mentors when developing my judging skills and both had a fine understanding of what winemaking was all about.

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



Chris: Initially in the kitchen but after a few messy ferments and with the expansion of my studio, I moved to where I could spread out and not worry about making mess. The studio had space for my accumulating equipment and storage.

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

Chris: The biggest surprise was the success I had making wine. After winning the Winemaker of the Year for 12 years in a row and then taking out major prizes in the Victorian Wines Show, I concluded that I must be doing something right. Without having the Guild as a vehicle for competition, none of this would have happened. Members of the Guild also encouraged me to train as a judge (I think they were trying to get rid of me) and I have found this to be a very rewarding and enjoyable job. The most positive aspect of the Guild however is the friends that I have made over the years.

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

Chris: Ben Ean and Blue Nun Liebfraumilch.

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

Chris: Do not procrastinate.

**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.**

Chris: Dandelion wine - although I haven't made it for a few years. I used to have the children pick the flowers for me, but they have since grown up and won't do it anymore. I never looked to the Guild for the social aspects of my life. I always considered it to be a teaching and learning group and this is what it has been to me.

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

Chris: "Suck it and See." and "Be Patient."

**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.**

Chris: My biggest disaster occurred when I was lifting a five gallon jar of wine on to a shelf and it collapsed. The jar exploded on the jars below

and I was saturated in 20 gallons of good wine. The disaster was not that I had cut a blood vessel in my arm and ended up in hospital, it was that I had lost all that wine. I kept telling the people attending to me who could smell the wine that "I was not drunk".

**Dave: I have asked this question of everyone and 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.**

Chris: Sitting down with friends to evaluate a fine home-made wine. The end product is still the motivation.

**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.**

Chris:

- Music – The Ying Tong Song by The Goons or maybe the complete Ring Cycle by Wagner.
- Book – The Wizard of Oz – My teacher was reading it to the class when I left England 69 years ago, and I never found out how it ended.
- Food – A Castle Combe lardy cake. We drove right across England to buy a lardy cake in Castle Combe - the best in England. The shop was shut. If this happens again I'll take faggots and mushy peas.
- Wine – A bottle of Gordon Evans potato wine marked 20 out of 20 by the judges. Unfortunately, it is just a memory. As you can't drink memories, I would take a good quality mead.

