

My Vintage Year

By: Dave Chambers

Today it is Steve Ney. I have known Steve for a couple of years now. Having first met him at a Eltham Wine Show about three or four years ago. Typical of Steve he is always there helping wherever possible on both the set-up judging day or the open day for wine tasting. You are gold Steve, people like you, that just put in.



We would benefit more if Steve lived in Melbourne but alas, he lives in NSW. Fortunately for him he has more superior skills at wine making than he does for selecting places to live. I'm joking of course he lives in Mt Keira Road, Wollongong which sounds as though it has a fabulous view and is quite near a park. I am after this Interview thinking there are a whole lot more questions I have of Steve about his Japanese experiences. No secret I am passionate about the Japanese and their wonderful country. Steve is considering joining the FAWG. I hope he does, if for no other reason than all wine guilds should be supported. It is almost a men's shed for wine connoisseurs, both men and women alike. And another hobby horse of mine is trying to get a beneficial deal for all members to belong to both guilds. And you may be reading this in the EWDG Newsletter. We are going to have more collaboration with both guilds in 2024, I hope.

I find myself agreeing almost always with the desert island choices of all interviewees. What would you take to [Loloata Private Island Resort, Papua New Guinea](#).

Dave: Why wine and not beer.

Steve: As a young man ½ glass of beer left me feeling sick, so spirits became my drink of choice. In my early twenties I started drinking wine & have enjoyed doing so ever since. I started my wine making journey 8 years ago, during my second vintage, after a long day of making & tasting wine I couldn't face more wine that night & I drank my first beer in 45 years. I now enjoy trying different craft beers with all their nuances, beer brewing is on the distant horizon. My family now enjoy reminding me that making wine drove me to beer.

Dave: What wine region or village anywhere in the world is your fantasy wine tasting destination.

Steve: I've always enjoyed travelling, I will go anywhere if the opportunity arises, when I travel, I make a point of tasting & drinking the local wines. My fantasy is to visit every wine making region in Australia.

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

Steve: I remember as a child that Australians drank beer, foreigners drank wine, a dreadful stereotype from the 60's.

Expovin 1979 - an opportunity to consume lots of alcohol at low cost, which ultimately started a journey of discovery in the world of wine.

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

Steve: Because of family & friends my wines are well travelled.

My wines have been consumed in Queensland, Victoria, New Zealand, Crete & Japan.
All with positive Feedback

Dave: What wine do you prefer to make Red or White and what variety.

Steve: I prefer to do something different whenever possible, predominantly I make red for two reasons.

Red grapes are more abundant & white wine is my nemesis, I've more failures than successes. I prefer to make anything that I haven't made previously, I will attempt anything subject to availability. I have a growing interest in country wines & mead.

Angela Harridge has a Vice Presidents Question for you:

Question: You've been making Umeshu for the last few years. It's not your everyday liqueur. Can you share with us what got you interested in it, what it is and how it is made?

Steve: For many years we had Japanese students stay with us on exchange programs. We remain in contact with some of them, my wife has always loved Japan & has visited more times than I want to count. My brother-in-law has lived in Japan for 8 years.

My wife is a big fan of Umeshu, when anybody returns from Japan we always receive Umeshu & whiskey. When we go to Japan my wine & now my Umeshu also travels.

Umeshu is a Japanese plum liqueur. There are many variations to Umeshu which I find fascinating, every time I search for information, I learn something different. The finished liqueur has an abv ranging from 12% to 30%.

It is relatively simple to make. You steep sour plums & sugar in white spirit.

Time is the key ingredient the minimum steeping time is 1 year ideally it should steep for 3 years.

My batches are currently 2 years old & are already being enjoyed here & Japan.

Ume plums are used in Japan to make Umeshu & Umeboshi, a pickled plum, which is an acquired taste.

I've not been able to source Ume plums in Australia so I currently substitute a middle eastern variety called janerik



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.

Steve: I believe that technical astuteness does give you an edge, it allows you to have an understanding of the "why" of your experience giving greater depth to your understanding of your developing skill set.

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.

Steve: I love every part of the discussion about wine, my sensory skills are at best, underdeveloped, I enjoy listening to a skilled person dissect a wine & then following, trying to pick the identified components. At the other end of the spectrum I've been with friends who find the wine world intimidating & I suggest, take a deep sniff, the first part of the taste sensation, take a sip & move it round your mouth & swallow. Did you like it? Yes – it's a great wine. No – try something different.

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.

Steve: As a young man who believed he could do everything better than everybody else, I was grounded by an old craftsman, his words were: *It amazes me that an amateur without training &*

the correct tools believes he will do a better job than a trained person with all of the correct tools"

The comment has stayed with me & I approach everything with this in mind. For wine making I gleaned as much information as I could from all sources, as I started the process I accumulated the best tools that I could afford.

I tend to be pedantic, at least with the fundamentals so that I have a baseline to work from if I choose to allow the wine to follow it's own path.

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

Steve: Home wine making should be about pushing the boundaries. I love that country wines are only limited by a person's imagination.

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

Steve: I make wine for myself & friends.

The first year I made wine some close friends visited & I offered a tasting of my first wine, with apprehension they accepted, with even greater trepidation they took a sip. Instant relief & *"hey this isn't bad; we expected the worst."*

The greatest accolade I have had.

From that day I was inspired to do better.

Who am I kidding, who doesn't love a gold medal.

Dave: Who or what has been your biggest influence in wine making and how long have you been a Wine Maker.

Steve: My daughter was studying wine science, apparently, I drove her crazy with questions about the process of making wine. October 2014, she drew a line in the sand, *"no more questions unless you actually do something"*. We purchased apples & made apple cider, a simple way to learn the process. Plans were put in place to make wine as my daughter was not going away to do a vintage & would be around to help. Early March I purchased my grapes, while we were processing them my daughter receives a phone call, we had somebody dropout please come & help, sorry dad I'm off to Rutherglen tomorrow you'll be OK.

She was right, eventually I was OK & the fun hasn't stopped.

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

Steve: My winery is often described as compact. Part of a single garage. Everything is on wheels, press, tubs, tanks, kegs & barrels, so the layout can be adjusted to suit the current job. The space is challenging given that my two largest years I processed 1,900kg in 2019 & 1,500kg in 2020

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

Steve: The warmth & friendship extended by everyone I encounter.

The generosity of members who will spend time & offer advice & assistance.

Dave: What were you drinking in your twenties.

Steve: Sweet & fruity German wine, whiskey & bourbon.

The wine slowly improved in quality.



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

Steve: Don't procrastinate, do it now & enjoy every moment.

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

Steve: I was fortunate enough to learn early that a small addition of a different wine could fill an obvious gap in a wine taking it to a whole other level.

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.

Steve: First vintage doing manual calculations for my first PMS addition, mixing up the decimal points adding 100 times the dose. I'll leave the result to your imagination.

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.

Steve: Tricky question.

I started making wine because I was & still are fascinated by the process. I was also considering things that I might do in retirement & this hobby creates stuff that people actually want.

Financial consideration was not a driver but I struck a deal with my wife if I could make good wine I would cancel all of my wine subscriptions (there were way too many) to fund my equipment purchases – win/win

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 and declared at the customs terminal on your way to Loloata Private Island Resort, Papua New Guinea.

Steve: Dark Side Of The Moon – Pink Floyd

Wynns John Riddoch Cabernet Sauvignon

Rib eye steak cooked over charcoal with salad.

Master & Commander – Patrick O'Brian



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