

## 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 David Wood

I have been in discussion with David via email over some months now. Until two weeks ago had not made his acquaintance. I find him as you all do a passionate advocate for the Wine Guild. As passionate as his wine making. He is effusive and helpful, his newsletter skills just keep getting better and better. The guild is lucky to have many people like David Wood. I find him warm and friendly and can cast him as a new wine making friend. I hope the following interview gives you some more insights into his character and need to make good wine and why he is possibly your friend also.

Dave: Why wine and not beer.

David W: Why not both? When I first started making wine I realised that it would take some time to 'mature' and be ready to drink, so I started making beer again for a quick beverage. I now seldom make beer, but do have kegs and gas to fall back on

Dave: How did Wine Making as a hobby unfold for you. Has this been an easy path. What came first the Wine Guild or Wine Making.

David W: I had about 20kg of blood plums in the freezer from my tree at Mornington. Had made jam, sauce etc., what to do with the rest? Then I saw a newspaper advertisement for winemaking classes at FAWG and that started the journey.

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

David W: I had started to enjoy red wine more as time went on. And my palate matured (or started wearing out?) My family were mostly beer drinkers when I was young, however it was always a tradition to have some cold sparkling re at Christmas time and this is my earliest memory of enjoying wine (still one of my favourites today).

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

David W: Certainly not. I come from a relatively large family and finding room for winemaking (even if I had the inspiration) would have been challenging. I did make some beer during my Uni days but that stopped for some years, once I started working full time.

Dave: What is an interesting unknown fact about you that members of Frankston Guild may find interesting.

David W: I did not know it until late in the piece, that my grandfather (who was estranged from the immediate family for some time) was a Royal Melbourne Show wine judge. He lived in Rutherglen after retirement and when we visited, he would drag out really old bottles of wine from his tin shed with just the two competition code numbers on them. Often the rest or all of the ID was missing – bit of a lucky dip really. He did have some magnificent 'stickies' though.

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

David W: I am really boring in that regard, never had any interest in wild parties.

Dave: What are you making now. And what wine have you made recently that is your best achievement so far

David W: At present I have mariposa plum wine fermenting, have just bottled some mandarin, cucumber and fennel leaf. I have mango, nectarine, kiwifruit and some 'clean out the freezer' multi fruit wine stored in demijohns to rack and then bottle.

As for the best achievement, I suppose vintage 2020 Cab Sav from the Briars was an achievement. For those that are not aware I and a group of volunteers maintain a vineyard of about 1100 vines for the local council. In return we take the grapes and make about six groups or individuals make wine from the grapes. Trying to cut a long story short: due to Covid restrictions we were locked out of the vineyard days before harvest was due. We got back in to pick about 2 months later. The grapes were in a pretty bad condition, lots had turned black with fungal

attack. However, we harvested the best we could. Some volunteers just walked away. I ended making a normal ferment, a wild yeast ferment, a rose and a couple of litres of grappa all from the wine that 'nearly wasn't'.

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

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

David W: FAWG winemaking classes was where I started. I used traditional recipes gleaned from many sources including books and the internet at first and of course picked many valuable insights from other guild members. I tend to make my country wines in a more 'streamlined' manner to the old recipes. I rarely use dried fruit or grains in my country wines – just put in extra fruit. And I tend to make a lighter style of wine, more drinkable on a warm summer's day.

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 for you.

David W: Not really. I enjoy my winemaking experience and try to pass on the skills in the winemaking classes that I tutor for the guild, with assistance of other guild members.

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.

David W: I am a bit of a 'fly by the seat of my pants' winemaker. Not that I am lax in technique or hygiene, but I do like to experiment with different ingredients and 'co-ferments'. Tend to record the details of my recipes once the wine is fermenting. Always put tags on demijohns to record treatments, or additions, as I go along.

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.

David W: Winemaking is important to me – it's the best way to 'time-shift' and enhance fruit that I know of. But it is not a fully consuming passion (no matter what my wife says).

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

David W: Mostly trying to infuse some 'new blood' into the guild as our average age of membership has been climbing. We need to pass on experience and expertise to younger winemakers.

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

David W: Certainly, on-going improvement is important, but I do like to receive the odd medal at shows and also get feedback from the judges as to how some wines may be improved. Not all judges 'get' the newer style of country wine that I am striving for.

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

David W: All the guild members of FAWG who generously pass on their techniques.

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

David W: Crammed into my garage and occasionally spilled out onto my driveway during a big harvest year for the grapes from The Briars. See below—no laughing please!





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

David W: Too many to mention, but I suppose you could summarise it as the 'fellowship' of winemakers.

Dave: What were you drinking in your twenties.

David W: Beer and sparkling red on special occasions.

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

David W: Start making wine as early as possible!

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

David W: As mentioned earlier, I like to experiment with flavours and aromas. I have received some good feedback on some liqueurs I have made with ingredients such as green walnuts, vanilla powder, many different spices, etc. I once made a hops wine that was not all that pleasant, however I distilled the spirit off and it carried over the lovely hoppy bitterness, which became a good foil for balancing out the sweetness of some liqueurs.

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.

David W: I have been pretty lucky on the whole. I did press of a country wine once not realising that I had put too much pressure on the demijohn during the process. Came back the next day to find a pool of wine beneath the demi that had leaked out through a hairline crack. Still salvaged most of the wine.

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.

David W: First it was being able to time shift ingredients that would otherwise go to waste.

The bonus is that with time and experience the resulting beverages, to my way of thinking, get better and better.

### **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.

David W: Music – any Paul Kelly album (preferably his large digital compilation collection); Wine- Warrabilla 2009 Durif (magnum, if possible); Food – I'd just bring my wood fired smoker to cook what ever I could scavenge on the island.

A man was marooned on a desert island. One day a beautiful woman arrives in a wet suit.

'When did you last have a smoke?' she asks. He said 'Five years ago.' So she gets out a cigar and he smokes it.

She unzips her wet suit a bit and says, 'When did you last have a drink?' He said, 'Five years ago.' So she gets out a bottle of Scotch and he has a drink.

Then she unzips her wet suit a bit more and says, 'And when was the last time you played around?' He looks at her in amazement and says: 'You're not telling me you've got a set of golf clubs in there?'

**Ronnie Corbett**