

## 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 Vincent Conserva.**

**Vince as you will read further on is a member at both Eltham and Frankston. This is becoming the norm for quite a few members, and I think we need discussion about a special rate to join both guilds.**

**But today it is about Vincent. He is a reasonably new member at Frankston Guild but due to his very nature of wanting to help, is already on the committee. Vincent is very generous personally as he is with finding that extra time for a committee. I remember the first time I met him, some four or five years ago, he gave me a Wine Book. As he did with others in the room. He volunteers often at both guilds and is a valuable contributor to both guilds. Vincent has an inquisitive and intelligent mind. You will find him very engaging on all topics, particularly his interest in Wine Making. He will become a very good Wine Maker with time. And we are lucky to have him on the committee and as a member at Frankston. His story so far on his wine journey I found fascinating, and I think you will too. And the Desert Island Chill Out, yes I agree, pretty much exactly what I would take mate.**

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

Vincent: Wine generally gets better with age while beer just goes flat!

**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.**

Vincent: I think it was in my genes. Growing up in Adelaide, I remember dad making his own wine. We used to stomp on the grapes with our feet. The wine was awful. Then many years later, a mate of mine came along 5 years ago and said his father-in-law had a vineyard and I should help make a better wine. His logic was I had a chemistry background and surely could do it. So, the challenge was accepted. I spent some time with Robin at Laffort trying to grasp the basics and then contacted Zenon who introduced me to the guild and the rest is history.



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

Vincent: When I was in high school, I was quite good at chemistry. I also lived quite near to the Waite Institute in Adelaide which was connected with Roseworthy College which was the home of Oenology. I made some enquiries but was told you needed to prove some family lineage in winemaking to be accepted. I asked my parents and it turns out that my grandfather was a wine-maker. So, I got my appli-

cation accepted and could have joined the likes of Wolf Blass but at the last minute decided to switch and take up Chemical Engineering.

**Dave: Did that immediately lead to your hobby of making wine or cider.**

Vincent: That desire lay dormant until 5 years ago. As they say, all chemical engineers retire and start making wine.

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

Vincent: I am a part time Maths and Chemistry teacher and also enjoy tutoring students.

Dave: If money was no object what wine or beverage fantasy purchase are you making with unlimited funds.

Vincent: Anything in the Penfolds premium range like St Henri or Bin 389.

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

Vincent: Have been making cool climate Shiraz for past 5 years. Each vintage is very different. Have just started making my first loquat wine. It is bubbling away. As they say, I have crossed over to the dark side of fruit wines.

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

Question: Vince coming from a chemical engineer's background did you think that it would be easy to make wine. And if so, what is your opinion now if this has changed for you.

Vincent: Yes, I arrogantly thought it would help but as time passes and each vintage passes, I realise there is so much more to making wine than a bit of chemistry. It is actually dangerous to think about the chemistry, as you start to believe that you can add this or that and cure things but it all starts in the vineyard, and the vagaries of the terroir and the weather. Each year is so different, you have to almost "feel, smell and taste" what is happening with the grapes and the wine along the journey.

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.

Vincent: It helps to understand the technical process and what is happening but I am not sure that necessarily translates into making better wine. I believe the quality of the grapes is where the magic begins and picking at the right time with the right flavour profile. These things are often totally out of your control.

Dave: Are you into the intellectual part of the dis-

cussion about wine. Wine can be so many things to so many people. But what does it bring to you.

Vincent: Yes I enjoy all aspects of wine making.



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.

Vincent: I have learnt to be more artisan in my approach and "feel my way" rather than stick to a prescriptive recipe. However, there are certain basics you just have to do right.

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.

Vincent: It appeals to my creative side to make something that you and others can enjoy. There is a certain pride that goes with that.

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

Vincent: I think there will be a resurgence in home making and younger people taking up the challenge. I see a lot of new grape varieties coming through which will give us all a taste of something different. I see a lot more experimenting with blends.

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

Vincent: Like all good athletes you compete to win but most importantly compete to perform at your best. Making a wine that is drinkable is first step and being judged by your family and friends on the quality of the wine. Then being judged by professionals and getting is a testimony to the success. I have received bronze medals for my last two years. Hopefully silver is next.

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

Vincent: Many people have helped along my journey but Robin at Laffort and Zenon from the guild have been there every step of the way. Also some of the other guild members like Danny Cappellani and David Hart have been good sounding boards. You pick up bits and pieces of information everywhere.

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

Vincent: We make it in a dedicated area under a house in Wandin North where the owner of the vineyard lives. Temperature stays relatively the same all year round at about 14-16C.

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

Vincent: The social side and the friendly nature of its members.

Dave: What were you drinking in your twenties.

Vincent: Mainly beer.

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

Vincent: Quoting words from a song: Never wait until tomorrow as tomorrow may never come. Nothing ventured nothing gained. Enjoy life and try and make people happy.

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.

Vincent: I have only made Shiraz but plan to start exploring other varieties. Both Eltham and Frankston guilds are great places to meet people and learn about wines.

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

Vincent: Just recently, I discovered that adding a little Viognier to Shiraz makes a real difference.

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.

Vincent: Adding PMS immediately after primary fermentation in the belief that this would protect the wine while it was transferred from open fermenter to a tank. then tried to inoculate with malo bacteria and it would not start. This led to the formation of H<sub>2</sub>S (rotten egg smell). Luckily we were able to rescue the situation by some aggressive aeration and addition of Copper sulphate.

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.

Vincent: Creating something that tastes good from just grapes.



### 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.

Vincent: Beatles, Let it Be. A bottle of Penfolds Grange. Charles Darwin 'The Origin of Species.' Leg of prosciutto and a loaf of my sourdough bread.