



My Vintage Year:

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 Michael Glover.



If you were like me fascinated by Michael from Mammoth Wines at his very instructive chat about his wine journey recently at our guild, you will find his Interview more than satisfying. I did. Michael is a passionate and considered Wine Maker. He is not in the order of those that follow convention. He is more likely to throw convention to the wind and forge his wine out of what nature provides. Not for him the tidy trimmed, fully greened, chemically extermin-

nated and irrigated vineyard. Give him a tortured vine struggling to exist with grapes full of texture mineralisation and mystery from the earth. Out of that grape within he will extract the elixir, somehow. He is a bon vivant of wine, ever searching for the magic, magic that releases flavour and uniqueness from a grape. A rare clear thinking, sharp individual, always looking for an edge.

Make interesting wines, you bet he will. Michael has no

time for the sycophants and bootlickers of the wine industry, the also ran wine writers and popular pedlars of wine parlance are an anathema. He, on his own admission wants wine makers of his ilk to throw bouquets of praise about what can be achieved with effort and smarts. I can't wait to try his wines. After reading this I'm sure you will also.

We need to get him back again for a Wine Masterclass of his own wines and some of his favourites. Wouldn't that be a memorable evening. I'm putting my hand up to ask him. We will pay for the wines Michael, you can't buy experience.



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

Michael: I was born into a wine drinking household that became grape growers and winemakers when I was about 14 or 15 so wine was kind of always around. It was when I was about 15 or 16 and had a glass of 1979 Chateau Malartic-Lagraviere that bells rang... I could have smelled that glass for hours. I can still smell it in my mind – cigar box, cedar, tobacco...intoxicating.

Dave: Did that immediately lead to your career in making wine.

Michael: Not immediately but it did kind of sow a seed for the future. Bit by bit I just grew into wine until at about 24 years of age I made the decision to pursue it professionally.

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

Michael: Well, it is kind of linked to the above question. I was a road cyclist and represented New Zealand as a Junior. I was obsessed with it and still am as a spectator. I was about 23 and knew that I just wasn't tough enough to ride in Europe, so I re-focussed on wine...much to my father's delight and disappointment.

Dave: If money was no object what wine or beverage are you buying with these unlimited funds.

Michael: Goodness, what an open question. I think I would be buying great wines from genuine and committed people from everywhere. The thing is that the 'people' bit is critical. I want friends and heroes in my cellar not arseholes. Although the sales and marketing side of the game likes to focus on real estate, soil types and weather events...wine is very much about people. I would buy

wine from the 'goodies'...the Bon Guis of the wine world.

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

Michael: I am just about to release a chardonnay called Kākāpō which has been in an old barrique for 4 years on gross ferment lees. It was made from fruit that was dry grown and organic. The wine sat in the barrel for 4 years with no additions and no stirring...this time renders the wine naturally stable, and the lees imparts texture and length. It is a wonderful beastie.

Leah Mottin has a Guest Question for you:

With reference to dry-grown vineyards, have you seen a shift in vine performance from the first harvest to the most recent?

Michael: It really depends on how you assess vine performance. The first year of any vineyard going dry after being irrigated can be challenging...the vines need time to adjust...but vines are remarkably hardy plants and they do adapt. I have noted greater resistance to both disease and seasonal changes (e.g., A sudden downfall that can result in fruit splitting etc.) from dry grown vines.

It is a generalisation, but the concept of dry growing is: Less water = less growth = less shade = less disease = less spraying. Yes, you also must accept less yield, but this also allows bestows earlier ripening, flavour ripeness at lower sugar levels and greater site expression.

Unfortunately for many in this 'business' or 'industry' vine performance is measured purely by yield rather than quality.

"Not everything that counts can be counted" – Albert Einstein (my favourite quote to accountants)

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 own wine making?

Michael: In a way this is true for me. You need to know what is going on technically and scientifically and try and master that. It is only then that the true wine-making begins...expression and individuality only come when you have conquered the basics. Until you are doing your own thing you are merely copying someone else's way. Why copy?

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?

Michael: Although I am without doubt a hedonist, I recognise that I am attracted to wines that are quite cerebral or difficult. I am attracted to the idea of a wine being made without any thought to the desires or tastes of the consumer or critic. There is purity in that. I also believe that for every batch of wine in any given year there is a 'perfect' way to make it. The larger, broader, and deeper your armoury of winemaking options and the braver you are then surely the more likely it is that you will make the right winemaking decision. Of course, you will never achieve the perfect wine, but you must believe it is possible.

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.

Michael: Now days after making wine for over 20 years I am lazy. I used to be fussy and pedantic but have realised that there is no need to do anything unless it needs to be done...this is so much harder than it sounds. Winemakers like to feel 'in control' which is kind of ridiculous. Control = beverage.



Dave: What is wine making to you. I suspect it is not just a job. But a consuming passion that excites you. Is this true.

Michael: I have often been described as passionate etc. What people don't realise is that great passion also brings with it great emotion, sleepless nights, anger, tears, fights, and frustration. It is not all ticket tape parades and adulation. I have some wine journo's who think I am brilliant, and I have some who hate me to bits. I know where they live and make firebombs in my spare time.

Dave: What are you excited about for the future of wine making. Markets are changing with China causing so much heartache. How do you see it unfolding over the next ten years?

Michael: Who knows? I suspect that consumers will become ever more demanding and knowledgeable.

I think there will be a huge growth in environmentally positive practices such as biodynamics and organics. We are at a crossroads with our environment, and I'd like to think that this is an opportunity for producers to realise this and involve their grape growing and winemaking in a way that connects themselves and their consumers with the land that their wine has come from.

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

Michael: I have not entered or judged at a wine show for a long time now and now feel embarrassed that I ever did. If I think back to my road cycling days it would have to be respect from your peers along with a good dose of curiosity, astonishment, and wonder. There are so many exciting, interesting, and dynamic ways to make wine but unfortunately so many boring dull clone-like wines made the same way.

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

Michael: Without question that would be my late father, Dr Dave Glover, who was pushing the winemaking boundaries way back before it was cool to do so. I remember a trip from Australia back to Upper Moutere about 10 years ago where dad greeted me with a sauvignon blanc that he'd made that had sat for 6 years in large wood under flor yeast! Inspired by a Vin Jaune from the Jura that he'd drunk he effectively made a NZ version. It was sensational and in true dad style did not sell it. He just gave it to people who understood the madness.

Dave: What were you drinking in your twenties.

Michael: Everything and anything that I could afford that lay claims to quality and greatness. I remember my wife Cath and I living in Wagga Wagga studying at CSU and surviving on Austudy. We bought a bottle of 1993 Latour and two bottles of 1993 Leoville Barton for 2 weeks' worth of Austudy and got by on bread and water.

It was worth it.



Dave: Can you describe where you make your wine now.

Michael: Not really. I live on the Mornington Peninsula having returned from 6 years in Aotearoa almost a year ago. I have made a tiny amount of Mornington Pinot Noir and Chardonnay but will still make wine back in Nelson when Covid allows me the freedom of flight again (fingers crossed). I don't have a winery or a vineyard, so I am free to seek out quality fruit that excites me from any region I like. If it is dry grown and organically farmed, I am interested.

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

Michael: "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist" – Pablo Picasso.



Dave: Is there a wine challenge that you particularly enjoy making over any other.

Michael: I am not sure that 'challenge' is the correct word but my favourite thing about winemaking is adventure.

Exploring different ideas and trying to find uniqueness expands your horizons on how to make wine.

Every year I have a map of what I am going to try to do and every year the map goes out the window on day 3 as you ride the vintage wave. You need a map to truly know that you have left the path!

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

Michael: Hmm...there are entire vistas of texture, flavour, and structure to be found outside of today's concept of the 'norm'. I am an advocate of whole bunch use in reds (and whites), time on gross ferment lees with whites, skin fermentation of whites, barrels made of acacia... the list goes on. Think broadly and with curiosity!

Dave: I have heard some complete disasters, from both commercial and hobby wine makers. What is your biggest disaster you can share with us?

Michael: Hmm...during vintage 1996 at The Rothbury Estate I oversaw the red ferments. All the red fermenters were static and required pump overs with a pump and hoses. We did have one solitary rotary fermenter which for those unaware is essentially like a giant concrete mixer that you can roll to mix the cap. I had been well drilled to NEVER leave the door of the Roto-Vat open for obvious reasons. In 1997 I was again in charge of the red ferments, but we had a new red winemaker who decided to leave the door of the Roto-Vat open and told nobody. I remember very well going to the Roto-Vat and hitting the button to roll the 20-tonne fermenter, ten seconds

later the sound of liquid slapping concrete as 2 tonnes of Hunter Shiraz burped out! Horrific. A river of red racing down the drive to Broke Road. It is times like these when you find out how popular you are in the cellar.

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?

Michael: Simple, I want to make wines that my peers think are exciting and dynamic. It's always about 'respect' from those that you want respect from! I want to be thought of as a bloody good winemaker by bloody good winemakers.

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.

Michael: Extremely tough question...but the wording seems to imply that I am expecting to be rescued or picked up, so I don't have to be too 'lifelong' in my selections.

I have always had a thing for Italy and Italian wine. My first few overseas vintages were in Italy and one of the great food wine and wine moments was travelling to Alba for the truffle festival. The trip to Alba is an end of vintage tradition at Tenuta di Valgiano, just out of Lucca in Tuscany. I travelled with the winemaker, Saverio Petrilli, up to Piedmont and purchased truffles that we then took to a neighbouring restaurant where they shaved them on to fresh pasta. It was the first time I had truffles and I was completely blown away. The wine that we selected was a huge gun...Giacomo Conterno 1996 Barolo...the truffles totally tamed the Barolo's tannins...they were made for each other. Glorious. I'll have a repeat of that thanks. The music? Let's stay in Italy and indulge in Lucca's very own Giacomo Puccini and Madam Butterfly. I'll be having the greatest Butterfly, Renata Tebaldi if you don't mind. Through various purely coinci-

dental contacts and luck I actually arranged to meet Renata Tebaldi at her address in Firenze. We got to her address on a cold October night and rang the phone. We could hear movement inside and the phone being taken off the hook! Ha! I got close!